WHATWORKS:

Career–building Strategies for People From Diverse Groups

1. Aboriginal Peoples
2. Ex–offenders
3. Gender
4. Immigrants and Visible Minorities
5. Older Workers
6. Persons Belonging to Sexual Minorities
7. Persons With Developmental Disabilities
8. Persons With a Diagnosed Mental Illness
9. Persons With Learning Disabilities
10. Persons With Low Income
11. Persons With Physical Disabilities
12. Youth

Alberta
HUMAN RESOURCES
AND EMPLOYMENT

This manual is written for career practitioners, counsellors, teachers and human resources practitioners. It provides best practices and strategies to use in your work with clients from diverse groups to help them explore personal management, learning and work exploration, and life/work opportunities. As well, it will connect you with further information and resources.

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What Works: Career–building Strategies
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Introduction

This is the third edition of *What Works: Career-Building Strategies for People From Diverse Groups*, a guide for career counsellors in their work with diverse populations. Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC) created the first edition. In 1999, HRSDC and Alberta Human Resources and Employment collaborated to update *What Works*. The previous two editions benefited from the research and writing of experienced practitioners who have worked with diverse populations.[1]

Seasoned counsellors and the literature remind us that career counselling is a vibrant and growing discipline. Indeed, the current climate of "career development growth and solidity" demonstrates that career counselling is a "strong cousin" among counselling specializations.[2] Counsellor educators remark that career counselling is a complex discipline, building on the competencies and craft of counselling: "…good career counsellors are, without exception, first and foremost skilled counsellors."[3]

What Works draws upon the experience of people with a variety of backgrounds. Professionals in career development and related fields were asked how they help clients recognize and build on their strengths. They were asked what ideas they would like to pass along to other practitioners. *What Works* summarizes these research findings and the expertise of those writing books and articles. And, *What Works* brings together some of the data, information, knowledge and wisdom that is available on the Internet. Websites are included to assist career counsellors in their work with clients. Resource organizations are included in the rich texture of community service providers and stakeholders. In this way, *What Works* is a multidimensional, interdisciplinary resource with multiple views about helping people from diverse groups manage change and recognize their potential.

Multicultural counselling

The diverse groups discussed in this resource represent minorities of the dominant population. As such, it is useful and appropriate to draw from multicultural counselling theory that identifies the importance of counsellor competence in three dimensions:[4] beliefs or self-awareness, knowledge and skill.[4] While some content in *What Works* touches on specific counselling skills, it is assumed that the counsellor audience has competent career counselling skills and knowledge.

Structure

Each of the following 12 chapters focuses on a specific population in order to present the related issues and suggested approaches to those issues. However, this resource is not exhaustive, and you may be working with groups not represented here. Many of your clients could likely claim membership in more than one group. The important point is not just that people are associated with several groups, but that each person is unique. Indeed, there is as much diversity throughout one of the groups represented as there is across the continuum of diversity.[5]

> *While the career development strategies and practices in this publication address a wide range of circumstances and situations, there are limitations in all possibilities. What Works is designed to be a career counselling reference and does not attempt to address underlying behavioural, learning or medical issues. Practitioners are advised to refer individuals to experts who can address issues beyond their scope of career counselling.*

Chapter sections

Each chapter addresses the following topics:

Introduction

- outlines the context, provides definitions

General Characteristics

- identifies issues and characteristics relevant to the group

- includes challenges that individuals within the group may face

Responding to Challenges: Strategies and Practices

- includes suggested approaches to address challenges faced by individuals
- includes tips and strategies provided by current practitioners and theorists

Focusing on Employment

- includes suggestions for helping persons associated with each group move toward meaningful employment

Websites and Resource Organizations

- identifies relevant, current sources of information and resources of interest to counsellors and, in some cases, clients

Selected Bibliography

- includes some classic works as well as current resources about each diverse group

Endnotes

- identifies the sources of ideas and quotes
- assists you with any further research you may wish to do.

Client-driven, strength-based approach

What Works is based on a client-driven, strength-based approach. Client-driven implies client ownership in the career-building process. A strength-based approach emphasizes clients' competencies, capacities and resources both internal and external, including family, community and environment. The theoretical basis of the strength-based approach cannot be attributed to any one source.[6] Rather, it represents a combination of approaches, including:

- positive psychology: focusing on work such as "signature strengths" created by Seligman[7]
- resiliency: recognizing the ability of people to achieve positive outcomes and overcome challenges, barriers and negative circumstances[8]
- hope-focused counselling: helping clients access their hope and thus, facilitating the career-building process.[9]

How to use this resource

As a tool for reflection

What Works may provoke readers to reflect on beliefs, assumptions and accepted ways of assisting people from diverse populations and backgrounds. The theory and practices cited in *What Works* may also provide additional food for thought and inspire you to try new career counselling approaches or coaching practices.

As an aid in client interaction

In keeping with a client-centred, strength-based focus, following are some suggestions for interacting with clients:

- Clients are the very best resource about themselves. Go to them first for clarification and information.
- It is important to work collaboratively with people so that the process is always about them and they always know what is happening. "Put clients first, work collaboratively, be respectful, build trust and don't judge."[10]
- "To help clients build on their strengths, you need to know their strengths, and that means taking time to get to know them."[11] It is assumed that the strategies described in this resource will be used over time and in a manner that builds on a base of effective career counselling skills.

As a way to build hope

"One of our first tasks as counsellors is to instil a sense of vision or hope in our clients."[12] The work of Seligman[13] and Gelatt[14], among many others, points out the momentum-building forces of optimism and hope. Pessimism and despair cannot support people as they try to make changes in their work and lives. Optimism, hope and a positive world view certainly can.

Hope-focused counselling encourages counsellors to intentionally look for and help clients explore hope. The process of facilitating clients' discovery of their own hope can be woven through counselling interactions, providing extra energy and support to help clients move forward.[15]

As a source for referrals

It is important to build and maintain relationships in your community and within your discipline. A key message in *What Works* is to consider clients' needs in a holistic manner. Knowledge of other community agencies and their mandates can help you make informed referrals so that clients obtain the help they need to address basic needs, access in-depth counselling or acquire additional help. Knowledge of community resources can also benefit your professional development. Building a supportive professional network is another way to enable you to continue to grow and share your expertise.

As a base for further learning

This resource may help you continue to apply, personalize and extend your skills and knowledge. *What Works* is just the starting point from which you are encouraged to add relevant articles and ideas regarding the diverse populations you choose to learn more about.

Websites and Resource Organizations

Alberta Human Resources and Employment. Retrieved May 6, 2005, from **www.gov.ab.ca/hre**

- has information on programs and services related to employment and training, labour market information, income support and health benefits for Albertans

Alberta Learning Information Service (ALIS). Retrieved May 6, 2005, from **www.alis.gov.ab.ca**

- has career, learning and employment information and services related to career planning, post-secondary education and training, educational funding, job search, labour market trends and workplace issues
- includes e-CareerShop, an on-line catalogue of career development resources

Authentic Happiness. Retrieved on July 16, 2005, from **www.authentichappiness.org**

- a website associated with the Authentic Happiness book by M.E.P. Seligman
- includes signature strengths questionnaire
- has archive of Authentic Happiness coaching newsletters

Canadian Career Development Foundation. Retrieved on June 27, 2005, from **www.ccdf.ca**

- a charitable foundation "committed to advancing the understanding of career development"
- has Career Clearinghouse catalogue of resources

Canadian Policy Research Networks. Retrieved on July 1, 2005, from **www.cprn.com**

- includes publications on social and economic policy, on work, on learning and on the future

Contact Point. Retrieved on June 27, 2005, from **www.contactpoint.ca**

- resources for multi-sectoral career development practitioners
- The Canadian Journal of Career Development
- site of the NATCON Papers

Canadian Standards and Guidelines for Career Development Practitioners. Retrieved on June 27, 2005, from **www.career-dev-guidelines.org**

- includes core competencies for all career development practitioners
- has 10 areas of specialized knowledge—examples include career counselling and work development
- includes Code of Ethics for career development

Circuit Coach. Retrieved on July 1, 2005, from **www.ccdf.ca/NewCoach/english**

- a curriculum or series of tutorials on helping youth with their life and work issues from a career development perspective that builds upon current thinking and practice

Education Resources Information Centre. Retrieved on June 27, 2005, from **www.eric.ed.gov**

- the digital library for the ERIC database

Life-Role Development Group. Retrieved on June 27, 2005, from **www.life-role.com**

- includes articles and tools to download for use with clients

The Hope Foundation of Alberta. Retrieved on July 16, 2005, from **www.ualberta.ca/HOPE**

- has information, services, links and community resources provided by this not-for-profit organization

The Person-Centered Planning Education Site. Retrieved on June 27, 2005, from **www.ilr.cornell.edu/ped/tsal/Enable**

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Endnotes

[1] Writers and researchers responsible for editions one and two of *What Works: Career Building Strategies for Special Needs Groups* were: Audrey Stechynsky, Bev Ross, Claire Clark, Wendy Fox, Helen Handcock, Jim Geekie, Jerri Vossos, Keri Chevalier, Jeri Melthing Tallow-Healy, Cristy Hayden and Gayle Harper.

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CHAPTER 1

Aboriginal Peoples

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Aboriginal Peoples

> It's so important to be aware of issues and concerns of clients and to know how to address concerns. When the expected outcome is employment, time is an issue, but we are setting people up if we don't help them deal with their personal concerns first. If they are not job-market-ready, then we need to help them with that, then move to employment.
>
> Norma Giroux
>
> Alberta Human Resources and Employment

Introduction

In the *Constitution Act, 1982*, the term Aboriginal Peoples of Canada includes three distinct groups: Indians, Inuit and Métis.[1] Within this chapter the term "First Nations" is used rather than "Indian" except in the following instances:

- in direct quotations from other sources
- in reference to specific legislation that uses this term, such as the *Constitution Act, 1982* or the *Indian Act*
- when citing statistical information collected using this category, such as Statistics Canada data (eg. use of the term, North American Indian)
- where the term is used to identify different legal categories of persons based on eligibility for government programs or services (eg. registered Indian, status Indian).

It is acknowledged that while persons belonging to a particular group may share similar backgrounds and cultural experiences, they are also unique individuals bringing their own beliefs, values and world views. The information included in this chapter applies generally to First Nations, Métis and Inuit, and may or may not apply to specific individuals within the three groups.

Background

With the passage of the first *Indian Act* in 1876, and the amendments to that *Act* in 1879, the federal government was given great power over Indian people living on reserves. The *Act* stated who was an Indian and who was not; it controlled movement from the reserves; it dictated when and where children would go to school; and it denied Indian people the right to vote unless they first gave up their Indian status and treaty rights. Sections of the *Act* also gave the federal government authority over Indian people who had no reserve lands. It wasn't until the early 1960s that Aboriginal people were allowed to vote under federal law without losing status or treaty rights.[2]

Five hundred years of colonialism created dependency among groups of people who previously had their own government, laws, economy, religion and language. The outcomes of colonization have, for some, included adaptation and assimilation within the dominant society. However, for many others, it has led to a loss of identity and well being often characterized by substance abuse, unemployment and involvement with the child welfare and correctional systems.[3]

The Government of Alberta provides an example of how Canadian provinces continue to work towards closing the quality of life gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. It released an Aboriginal Policy Framework in September 2000 outlining principles and commitments for capacity building and economic development.[4]

The framework was designed to address:[5]

- urban and rural issues within Aboriginal communities
- cross-cultural awareness
- concerns of youth
- partnerships between Aboriginal people, industry, government and other interested parties
- roles and responsibilities regarding use and development of public lands
- access to employment and business contracts.

A comprehensive evaluation of the outcomes of this framework will be completed in 2007–2008.

"Through the Urban Aboriginal Strategy, the Government of Canada partners with other governments, community organizations and Aboriginal people to support projects that respond to local priorities. Between 2003 and 2005, the Government of Canada contributed approximately $14 million to nearly 100 projects that targeted improvements in areas such as: 'stay-in-school' and other life-long learning initiatives, housing, health and outreach services."[6]

"The Métis are one of the three distinct Aboriginal Peoples of Canada, as recognized in the 1982 Constitution. The Métis people were born from the marriages of predominantly Cree, Ojibwa and Salteaux women and the French fur traders, beginning in the mid-1600s. Scottish, Irish, Scandinavian and English stock was added to the mix as Western Canada was explored…Settlements sprang up from the upper Great Lakes to the interior of British Columbia; from the Mackenzie Delta to the north central United States. Today, the Métis Homeland encompasses Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia."[7]

In 1999, the Government of Alberta and the Métis Nation of Alberta Association (MNAA) signed a seven-year framework agreement. One of the objectives is to ensure effective participation by Métis people in the development of and access to Alberta government policies, programs, initiatives, resources and services.[8]

An historic event for Métis people occurred in 2004, when the Government of Canada committed to "working with Métis leadership and the provinces in order to find the place of the Métis in the Government of Canada's policies."[9]

Statistics

According to the 2001 census analysis series published by Statistics Canada:[10]

- Just over 1.3 million Canadians reported having some Aboriginal ancestry, representing 4.4 per cent of the total population. In 1996, people with Aboriginal ancestry represented 3.8 per cent of the total population.
- The majority of Aboriginal people were North American Indians with a population of 608,850 or 62 per cent of the Aboriginal group.
- Of the three Aboriginal groups (North American Indians, Métis and Inuit), the largest population increase between 1996 and 2001 was among the Métis with a 43 per cent increase. The Métis, with a population of 292,310, represented about 30 per cent of the Aboriginal population.
- The Inuit registered a population of 45,070, representing five per cent of the Aboriginal population.
- The remaining three per cent of the Aboriginal population was comprised of persons identifying with more than one Aboriginal group or registered Indians or band members who did not identify as Aboriginal.
- The highest concentrations of Aboriginal people were in the North and on the Prairies. Aboriginal people accounted for 85 per cent of the total population in Nunavut, 51 per cent of the Northwest Territories and 23 per cent of the Yukon.
- Aboriginal people represented 14 per cent of the total population in each of Manitoba and Saskatchewan and five per cent in Alberta.[11]
- Almost one-half (49 per cent) of Aboriginal individuals lived in an urban setting according to the 2001 census. Thirty-one per cent lived on reserves and 19.5 per cent lived on rural non-reserve land.
- Internationally, Canada's population of Aboriginal people ranks second highest in the world following New Zealand, whose Maori population accounts for 14 per cent of that country's total population.
- Between 1951 and 2002, the Aboriginal population of Canada increased sevenfold while the Canadian population as a whole only doubled.
- There are more than 600 First Nations communities in Canada.[12]
- There are 53 different Aboriginal languages.[13]

Statistics Canada provides additional information regarding the increases in the Aboriginal population, suggesting that the significant increase in the last 50 years is only partly due to demographic change. "The remaining increase is accounted for by various other factors, such as fewer incompletely enumerated reserves and an increased tendency of people to identify as Aboriginal. The trend to increased reporting of Aboriginal origins or identity has been evident since the 1986 Census and is thought to have resulted from an increased awareness of Aboriginal issues."[14]

Some further information provided by the Statistics Canada 2001 Census includes:[15]

- The Aboriginal population was younger than the non-Aboriginal population. The median age for the Aboriginal population was 24.7 years compared to that of the non-Aboriginal population at 37.7 years. Median age is the point where exactly one half of the population is older and the other half is younger.
- Children aged 14 and under represented one third of the Aboriginal population and 19 per cent of the non-Aboriginal population. Aboriginal children represent 5.6 per cent of all children in Canada.
- 24 per cent of individuals who identified themselves as North American Indian, Métis or Inuit reported having enough knowledge of an Aboriginal language to carry on a conversation, down from 29 per cent in 1996.

Canada's First Nations, Métis and Inuit people have unique characteristics, varied lifestyles, strengths and challenges. While this chapter will be a helpful resource, career counsellors are encouraged to continue learning about the culture and background of Aboriginal clients.

> *"Everyone's world views are entirely different. Go into each situation with an open mind. You can meet two people from the same community who will be very different. All generalizations don't apply to all individuals. Depending on how you are raised, it is different for each individual."*
>
> Crystal Kosa
>
> Aboriginal Human Resource Development Council of Canada

General Characteristics

Terminology and definitions

In working with Aboriginal clients, counsellors are encouraged to be familiar with some terminology as described by Alberta Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. These terms are derived from the federal *Indian Act*, the *Constitution Act, 1982* and Bill C-31. Common terms not defined by legislation are indicated with an asterisk (*).[16]

Aboriginal People
This term refers to the descendants of the original inhabitants of Canada. Aboriginal people are defined in the *Constitution Act, 1982* as all indigenous people including Indians, Métis and Inuit. The Constitution does not define membership of the individual groups.

Aboriginal rights*
There are a number of different views about what in fact constitutes Aboriginal rights. Aboriginal people believe they have rights because of their long and special relationship with the lands they have occupied over a long period of time, as well as their use of those lands. The legal rights of Aboriginal people must be determined on a case-by-case basis.

Band or First Nation or First Nations
A band is defined in the *Indian Act* as a body of Indians, for whom lands have been set aside or monies held by the Government of Canada, or who have been declared by the Governor in Council to be a band. Most bands prefer to be referred to as First Nations.

Band membership
A band member is an individual Indian who is a recognized member of a band and whose name appears on an approved Band List. Where a band has adopted its own membership code, it may define who has a right to membership in the band, therefore being a status Indian is not necessarily synonymous with being a band member. Status Indians who are not band members are included in the General List.

Band Council
The Band Council includes band members who have been elected as chief and councillors, either pursuant to Section 74 of the *Indian Act* or by band custom, to govern the band and administer its affairs.

Non-status Indian*

This term refers to a person who is not recognized as an Indian under the *Indian Act*. In the past, Indian people often lost their right to be registered as an Indian as defined by the *Indian Act*. For example, prior to 1985, Indian women who married non-Indian men lost their status. The enactment of Bill C-31 restored Indian status to those who had previously lost it through marriage.

Reserve

The *Indian Act* describes a reserve as lands set apart for the use and benefit of a band and for which the legal title rests with the Crown in right of Canada. The federal government has primary jurisdiction over these lands and the people living on them.

Status or registered Indian

A status or registered Indian is a person who has been registered or is entitled to be registered according to the *Indian Act*. Most registered Indians are members of a band. By virtue of the *Indian Act*, the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada is responsible for providing support and services to all registered Indians.

Treaty

A treaty is a legal document that was signed with Indian bands and various British colonial and, later, Canadian governments before and after Confederation in 1867. No two treaties are identical but they usually provide certain rights, including annual payments for ammunition and annuities, clothing every three years, hunting and fishing rights, reserve lands and other entitlements. In signing a treaty, the Indian bands surrendered their prior rights, titles and privileges to the designated lands.

Treaty Indian

A treaty Indian is a person affiliated with a First Nation that has signed, or whose ancestors signed, a treaty and who now receives land rights and entitlements as prescribed in a treaty. Not all First Nations have signed treaties; for example, in British Columbia there are almost no treaties.

Treaty rights

Treaty rights are legal rights to lands and entitlements that Indian people have as a result of treaties.

Métis*

A French word meaning "mixed blood," Métis refers to descendants of First Nation and European ancestry who identify themselves as Métis. The Métis are recognized as Aboriginal people in the *Constitution Act, 1982*.

Legislation[17]

Bill C-31

Bill C-31 is the pre-legislation name of the 1985 *Act to Amend the Indian Act*. This legislation removed discriminatory clauses against women, restored status and membership rights and increased Indian control over their own affairs. Aboriginal people who have been reinstated as status Indians under this *Act* are often referred to as Bill C-31 Indians.

Constitution Act, 1867

Section 91(24) of the *Constitution Act, 1867* states that legislative authority for Indians and lands reserved for Indians rests with the Parliament of Canada.

Royal Proclamation of 1763

The British government proclaimed that the interests of Indian people and their lands must be protected and the Indian people must be dealt with fairly. This proclamation was necessary to protect the interest of Indian people in these lands as settlers occupied British North America.

Additional definitions can be found at Words First on the Indian and Northern Affairs Canada website.[18]

Lifestyle

First Nations, Métis or Inuit people may be connected with their traditions in varying degrees. The following is a simplified description of possible Aboriginal lifestyles that continue to remain relevant.[19]

Traditional

Although the opportunities to live a traditional lifestyle are rapidly diminishing, Aboriginal people could live off the land, hunting, fishing and/or trapping, having little contact with people outside this lifestyle.

Bicultural
Aboriginal people with a bicultural lifestyle are comfortable in both Aboriginal and mainstream cultures but may still have strong ties to tradition. For example, these people may live on a reserve and take part in the community's spiritual and cultural life but may work off the reserve in a non-Aboriginal setting.

Mainstream
Individuals living and working in a town or city, with few ties to their Aboriginal heritage, may be integrated into the mainstream culture.

Transitional
Aboriginal people not strongly connected to either mainstream or traditional culture may be in a period of transition. They could be in the process of moving from a rural area or reserve to a town or city or they may have been raised in a non-native family and may have only begun the search for their roots. These are simplified descriptions representing a few variables to lifestyle. There are many opportunities to participate in Aboriginal traditions while in urban settings.[20]

With respect to the working environment, Aboriginal clients may fall into two groups: those who are relatively familiar with the dominant society and its customs and those who are not familiar with the work ethic and social customs of the dominant society. Both groups commonly experience racial prejudice and discrimination.[21]

Cultural identity

The Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples states "Aboriginal people explained to us that their various nations have distinct cultures, with unique knowledge and understandings of the world around them."[22]

In his book, *Aboriginal Peoples in Canada: Contemporary Conflicts*, James Frideres describes three concepts of Aboriginal identity:[23]

- The first is a neo-traditional identity in which the Aboriginal person identifies with a blend of traditional spirituality and practices that reflect the dominant society and Christian beliefs.
- The second identity type, non-traditional, includes those who adopt most of the norms and practices of the dominant society and choose conventional helping services if and when these are required, and those who are culturally alienated, who have not adopted traditional ways and are not successfully coping within either conventional or Aboriginal society. Individuals who are culturally alienated may experience periodic or constant states of crisis and exhibit internalized symptoms of colonization such as depression, self-destructive behaviours or violence toward others.
- The third, traditional, are those who adhere to the teachings of the Elders and have a strong understanding of the old ways based on the symbiotic relationship with the earth.

The third group are more likely to use the services of Aboriginal agencies or Aboriginal social workers. If a client is more traditional, it is important for counsellors to understand that the individual is guided by the practices of that choice. This includes use of the pipe, traditional medicines and healing practices such as the sweat lodge, use of Elders and the healing circle.[24]

Storytelling
"Storytelling has always been an important part of cultural identity of the Aboriginal peoples of Canada. Stories were told to teach lessons, give warnings, and keep history alive."[25]

Values
Similar to many other cultural groups, Aboriginal people hold strong values related to children and family, including extended family.[26]

Values will, of course, be unique to each client. While it is helpful to have a general appreciation of common values that may be found within a particular cultural group, counsellors are encouraged to take time to understand what is fundamentally important to each individual and help clients use those values as a framework for the career-building process.

Education and training

Many programs have been created to provide education, training and employment for Aboriginal people.[27] Education and training is the key to increased employment. Increasingly, companies are encouraged to participate in co-op, summer placements, internships and apprenticeship programs that provide opportunities for Aboriginal students to have hands-on experience.

Partnerships between private and public sector organizations that provide employment and training to Aboriginal people are becoming more common.[28]

Entrepreneurship is growing in Aboriginal communities, with opportunities developing through ventures and collaboration with existing companies. "More than 600 Alberta firms owned by Aboriginal people are members of the Canadian Council of Aboriginal Business…There are over 20,000 Aboriginal businesses in Canada."[29]

Statistical information

Statistics support the assertion that education is a key factor relating to employment success. There is a direct link between the level of education completed and the rate of unemployment. The higher the level of education completed, the higher the rate of employment.[30]

"While many Aboriginal people in western Canada had a harder time in the labour market [between April 2004 and March 2005] than their non-Aboriginal counterparts, those who had completed some form of post-secondary education, such as trade school, college or university, did not."[31]

Statistics Canada also reported that, in Western Canada, between April 2004 and March 2005:[32]

- the employment rate for Aboriginal people aged 25 to 64 who had completed post-secondary education was 82.5 per cent, just below the 83.5 per cent for non-Aboriginal persons
- the unemployment rate for Aboriginal people with post-secondary education was 6.9 per cent, compared with 3.9 per cent for non-Aboriginal people
- the unemployment rate for all Aboriginal people aged 25 to 64 was 11.5 per cent and, for non-Aboriginal people, 4.4 per cent.

According to the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada:[33]

- In 2001–2002, 29.6 per cent of Aboriginal students enrolled in Grade 12 or Grade 13 graduated.
- For registered Indians, the post-secondary education attainment rate in 2001 was 23 per cent and for the total Canadian population, 38 per cent.

Challenges facing Aboriginal clients

Having a clear understanding of the challenges Aboriginal people face when preparing to look for employment or take part in further education is important. These challenges are very real and may contribute to lower labour force participation and higher unemployment rates for Aboriginal people.[34] There are, however, many Aboriginal people who have overcome challenges, achieved educational goals, developed solid job search skills and obtained positive work experience.

> *"There are two major challenges for many Aboriginals seeking a post-secondary education. First, some applicants have not completed a thorough investigation, so are unsure if they are in the right program. Secondly, and most crucial, Aboriginals leaving the reserve for the primary purpose of accessing this education and training are only eligible for tuition and books, not living expenses for Academic Upgrading Programs, from Alberta Works. Therefore many are not able to attend school. This is a surprise to many of these applicants and could mean they have to return home."*
>
> Luella Massey
> Norquest College

Workforce culture

Typical workforce culture and the traditional culture of an Aboriginal job seeker or employee are often strikingly different. Many Aboriginal people are accustomed to a co-operative work style. An environment that involves a more competitive work style is likely to be less satisfying to Aboriginal workers. Aboriginal values that place families and children before competitive advantage and financial gain may be in conflict with some work environments.[35] This can be a source of confusion, stress and isolation. Many Aboriginal people are accustomed to the support of a close network of family and friends. This fact, coupled with the relocation that they often experience in order to take work, can magnify their feelings that the workplace is unfriendly, cold and unsupportive.[36]

In addition, because the majority of jobs are secured through the "hidden" job market of word-of-mouth and contacts, and because Aboriginal people are under-represented in hiring positions, Aboriginal job seekers are at an added disadvantage.[37]

Career goals and career direction

Identifying career goals may be a challenge for Aboriginal people. While this is a common issue among clients in general, it has particular impact on Aboriginal people because they are a group whose traditional career opportunities have changed considerably. Some clients may be challenged with balancing their desire to give back to their community and to achieve personally satisfying work.[38]

McCormick and Amundson[39] note that the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples in Canada pointed to the high level of labour force growth in First Nations communities. The Commission also noted the shortages of trained First Nations people in fields such as economics, medicine, engineering, community planning, forestry, wildlife management, geology and agriculture. The majority of First Nations youth leave school early and without the credentials for jobs in either the mainstream economy or in their home communities. Motivating youth to complete their education is of great importance to the economic future of First Nations communities. Having career goals and a career direction is probably the greatest motivation for First Nations youth to finish school.[40] Mentorship opportunities and exposure to careers in a variety of industries have proven to be very helpful to Aboriginal people in general.[41]

Discrimination

"Systemic discrimination occurs when an existing practice or policy—or lack of a policy—results in the exclusion of a category of people. The result is that the individual is not treated the same or cannot access the same opportunities as others. Many members of the non-traditional labour force are victims of systemic discrimination."[42]

While measures have been taken to address discrimination and improve employment opportunities for Aboriginal people, continuing efforts are required regarding issues of discrimination.[43]

Discrimination is a serious impediment to Aboriginal employment. The factors that contribute to discrimination include:

- overt racial intolerance
- ignorance of Aboriginal customs
- prejudice as a result of stereotyping
- misinterpretation of Aboriginal shyness and lack of assertiveness.[44]

Social issues

Aboriginal clients trying to create life changes involving further education or relocation may face a variety of difficulties. While families and community leaders may be more supportive than in the past, it is a challenging adjustment.[45]

> *"Although it is a slow process, change is taking place. Now when someone leaves their Aboriginal community to pursue work or go to school there is more of a support system with the families and community. However, in some cases, even when there is support, students, in particular, will return home often due to the feeling of being overwhelmed and intimidated by the transition from their rural home communities to the urban settings."*
>
> Melissa Gillis
> Concordia University College

Clients who feel less supported by their communities may be receiving subtle or direct messages that suggest they are:[46]

- abandoning their families
- trying to become "better" than others in the community
- facing the possibility of assimilation; as a result, they may fear losing their community.

These messages may be discouraging to Aboriginal clients and may raise issues of self-doubt.

Health issues

Aboriginal people are overrepresented in the number of Canadians suffering from social, emotional and physical ill health. The Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples documents struggles with the breakdown in community and family order that underlie social and emotional challenges. It suggests that cultural and material losses experienced historically by Aboriginal people have contributed to:[47]

- anger
- grief
- damaged self-esteem
- a sense of hopelessness.

Related to cultural disruption and enduring hardship, addictions and substance abuse have become additional challenges for some Aboriginal people.[48]

Responding to Challenges: Strategies and Practices

Practitioners emphasize the importance of working with the whole client and not just their employment or education needs. This includes understanding cultural backgrounds and the challenges associated with being a member of a distinct cultural group as well as the personal challenges faced by each individual.[49]

What do I wish I had known when I first started working with Aboriginal clients?

"Even though my heritage is Métis, I wish I had known more about the history of our people as well as the rights of the Métis people. At present, all of our Labour Market Development Unit (LMDU) staff at our 16 Employment Services Centres across the province have extensive employment counselling training, access to resources and a knowledge of Métis culture and history that equips them to work successfully with our clients."

Diane Fehr

Métis Employment Services,
Region 3, Calgary

Characteristics of effective counsellors

Counsellors who are effective with Aboriginal clients:[50]

- recognize and respect the diversity among First Nations, Métis and Inuit
- are bicultural, either of First Nations, Métis or Inuit ancestry, or have a deep knowledge of Aboriginal culture and world views
- present themselves in an informal, friendly, interested, respectful and trustworthy way
- are accessible—tend to use a "drop-in" and a "quick-response" approach rather than appointments
- build and maintain a network of contacts (parents, band officials, Elders, Aboriginal role models, other helpers) in the Aboriginal community and participate in community affairs such as sports, ceremonies and feasts
- use a holistic and culturally relevant approach
- have a capacity to respond to a wide range of needs such as:
  - in-school adjustment
  - cultural demands and practices
  - spirituality
  - lifestyle and cultural identity issues
  - loss and grieving
  - violence
  - sexual abuse
  - transitions
  - cross-band rivalries
  - suicide
  - poverty
  - interactions with the criminal justice system
  - discrimination and racial conflict and bias
  - substance abuse.

- have explored the following personal questions:
  - Have I examined my own cultural beliefs and values?
  - What are the "shoulds" and "should nots," the rules, boundaries and behaviours of my culture of origin?

- Do I set my values and beliefs aside as I work with Aboriginal clients?
- What do I know about the Aboriginal cultures in my area? What do I need to find out?

Communication skills, including listening, synthesizing information, paraphrasing and responding to meaning and feeling, are essential for career counsellors to be effective in their work. According to one experienced counselling professional, the most important of all the skills involved in communicating with others is listening.[51] Counsellors are encouraged to become comfortable with periods of silence; Aboriginal people may be reflective and pause somewhat longer prior to responding.

Start at the beginning

Practitioners recognize the importance of helping clients identify and address personal issues before focusing on employment. Counsellors are encouraged to take the time to build clients' trust and rapport. Some clients may disclose information regarding personal issues that they are experiencing. If in doubt, counsellors can ask the following questions of clients:[52]

- Do you have any concerns regarding your family?
- Are there some things in your background that you haven't had an opportunity to deal with? How can we help you with that?
- Who might you go to for help with that?

Counsellors can assist clients by providing appropriate referrals to community resources. Possible sources of help for clients include:

- Elders
- community agencies.

Some counsellors may have expertise in assisting clients with personal issues. Experienced counsellors have suggested the following considerations:

- Know your professional boundaries. A Chartered Psychologist (or other professional counsellor) has a wider scope of ability to provide professional counselling.[53]
- Learn as much as possible about issues that clients face.[54]
- Discuss the situation with clients who are undertaking professional counselling and treatment at the same time as career counselling. This is not uncommon for clients, and sometimes making progress in establishing a career direction, and ultimately finding employment, has a positive effect on addressing personal issues.[55]

> *"Healing is something many Aboriginal peoples work towards. For many, it is dealing with history, loss of culture, change of lifestyle and the force of systems. Some approaches individuals may choose to promote healing include:*
>
> - *healing circles*
> - *healing camps*
> - *sun dances*
> - *discussions with Elders*
> - *treatment by physicians who incorporate natural approaches and who are knowledgeable about Aboriginal culture."*
>
> Norma Giroux
> Alberta Human Resources
> and Employment

Use a strength-based approach

An effective strength-based approach involves asking questions to prompt client identification of strengths. Because self-esteem and self-confidence are, in many cases, challenging to Aboriginal clients, asking the following questions may be helpful:[56]

- "Survival questions — eg. Given what you have gone through in your life, how have you managed to survive so far?
- Support questions — eg. What people have given you special understanding, support, guidance?
- Possibility questions — eg. What are your hopes, visions, aspirations?
- Esteem questions — eg. When people say good things about you, what are they likely to say?
- Exception questions — eg. When things were going well in your life, what was different?"

These questions can be woven throughout the career-building process to help clients focus on the positive aspects of their lives as they move forward.

Cultural awareness

Practitioners emphasize that a general knowledge of Aboriginal culture and values is vital when working with Aboriginal clients. Counsellors can learn more by:[57]

- speaking with Elders and other people within Aboriginal communities
- reading books and publications
- attending local cultural events and Aboriginal awareness workshops.

Counsellors should consider the cultural aspect of Aboriginal values and beliefs. For example, Aboriginal clients who highly value family ties, or may be very involved in family events that require time away from studies or work. Counsellors can help clients anticipate such circumstances and help them in planning for them.[58]

Traditional methods to use in counselling

Having cultural knowledge and an understanding of traditional methods are important in retaining Aboriginal identity and collective consciousness. A number of traditional methods can be used in counselling. Underlying these methods are three levels of empowerment:[59]

- *intrapersonal*: involves the enhancement of self-esteem and self-confidence
- *interpersonal*: involves the construction of knowledge and social analysis based upon experiences shared with others
- *community*: involves pursuing resources and strategies for personal and collective benefit.

Two examples of how these levels of empowerment can be used are illustrated in the medicine wheel and the sharing circle.

Counsellors may suggest that clients explore traditional symbols and approaches.[60] It will be important to confirm with clients that particular approaches are relevant and meaningful. The medicine wheel and sharing circle, for example, may be less meaningful to Métis clients. However, any Aboriginal individual may relate in varying degrees to these traditional approaches.

The medicine wheel

> *"Because the philosophy of balance is so important to the world view of Aboriginal people, it must be a consideration when making career/life decisions…The medicine wheel represents the balance that exists among all things."*[61]
>
> Rod McCormick
>
> University of British Columbia

Medicine wheel

The medicine wheel symbolizes completeness and interdependence and represents the circle of life. "Medicine" is defined as something that affects your well-being and "wheel" is the circle inside which everything is connected and can change direction. The teachings of the medicine wheel are a way of life and include the four aspects of human development: mental, spiritual, physical and emotional. This is a useful evaluation tool to use in career planning, problem solving and action planning. The concept assists clients to focus on the whole self in order to make realistic choices and decisions.[62]

Sharing circle

Social support is important to individuals in that it empowers, equalizes and creates knowledge that change can happen. A traditional practice that Aboriginal facilitators, especially Elders, use is the healing circle or talking circle often referred to as "having a sharing circle."

This method has the group form a circle where participants "share personal experiences and reflect on hopes and aspirations for personal and collective change. This is a traditional healing concept and a major method for sharing and resolving personal issues and problems."[63]

Helping clients with career goals

Relating life experiences to career goals

Aboriginal clients, who have not had the opportunity to gain work experience, frequently have difficulty relating their life experiences and skills to the world of work and opportunities in the labour market. Culturally sensitive counselling tools would help Aboriginal clients make appropriate career choices.[64]

Guiding Circles: An Aboriginal guide to finding career paths is a tool developed by the Aboriginal Human Resource Development Council of Canada. It offers an effective approach to holistic career planning with Aboriginal people. The tool "combines traditional teaching with sound contemporary career development exercises to arrive at a better understanding of one's self in terms of possible career goals."[65]

Guiding Circles also includes tips, in which counsellors are encouraged to consider their:[66]

- approach
  - Use a client-centered approach that engages clients wherever they are at in life, at the moment.
  - Be creative, flexible and innovative.
  - Use a holistic approach and involve clients at all levels.
- working relationship
  - Find common ground with clients.
  - Set clear goals and objectives.
  - Emphasize it is a collaborative process (and ensure that it is).
- reflection and action
  - Emphasize the importance of the journey to clients who don't think they have time for reflection and are anxious just to get a job.
  - Ask clients if what they have been doing is working. If not, ask them if they might want to try something different.
  - Encourage clients to take time for reflection.
- boundaries
  - Create a climate of emotional safety for clients.
  - Encourage clients to share only what they are comfortable with.
  - Give clients permission to stop if they seem to reach an uncomfortable level of self-disclosure.
- connections
  - Encourage clients to focus on what they have, not what they are missing, especially with regard to family, social groups and friends.
- patterns
  - Encourage clients to talk about their involvement in hobbies or leisure activities (tell their story).
  - Facilitate the storytelling process; don't direct it.
  - Capture clients' stories and details, with their permission.
- values
  - Help clients identify values that are important to them.
- understanding
  - Help clients review and understand what they have learned about themselves.
  - Help clients become aware that who they are relates directly to what they might do in both work and life.
- plan
  - Help clients articulate where they want to go (their vision) if they have not yet done so.
  - Help clients relate their action planning to their vision. Any action that they take has the potential to move them closer to or farther from their vision.
- clients' journey
  - Help clients understand that their journey is not likely to be in a straight line.
  - Emphasize that people don't need to know everything before they start taking small steps.
  - Let clients know that their vision will evolve as they learn more and their career journey is a walk taken one step at a time, with each new step helping to clarify the next steps.

Maintaining cultural identity

Maintaining their cultural heritage continues to be important to many Aboriginal people. Achieving this goal requires a commitment of time and energy that must be factored into clients' career decisions and work lifestyle. It may be helpful for counsellors to raise this issue by asking clients these questions:[67]

- What kinds of activities do you want to be involved in?
- Where do these activities take place?
- Do they require a rural lifestyle or an urban lifestyle?

- Do these activities place a limit on the distance you might want to be away from your family or from a particular reserve, settlement or organization?

When making a career decision, Aboriginal clients may wish to consider how they will continue to maintain their cultural identity while living and working in the dominant society. Counsellors may facilitate exploration of this issue by encouraging clients to consider:[68]

- Will you encourage your family to speak an Aboriginal language at home?
- How will you maintain emotional closeness with your extended family while living away from them?
- How will you ensure that the customs, values and attitudes that are important to you are passed from one generation to the next?
- What cultural activities can you participate in, in the city?

> *"Never create a 'greater than and less than' dynamic. Know who you are and where you come from and know your own boundaries and effectively maintain them. Listen, let go and be a role model."*
>
> Joanne G. Pompana
>
> Red Road Healing Society, Edmonton

Balancing values and career-building choices

Aboriginal clients holding traditional values may find it challenging to plan career- building strategies that balance their desire to give back to their community with achieving work that is personally satisfying.[69] Counsellors are encouraged to help clients explore these issues to ensure they consider the implications of career building choices that they make.

Expanding work options

Some clients may have limited exposure to the variety of occupations they might consider and may be inclined to focus on occupations they have had direct contact with or have seen other Aboriginal people involved in.[70]

It is important for counsellors to help clients consider a variety of work in order to broaden their view of work options. Participation in job shadowing, co-op experiences and internships provide hands-on exposure to a variety of work options.

Helping clients deal with discrimination

> *"Racial intolerance is a vicious cycle. In response to prejudicial treatment, an Aboriginal employee may withdraw or respond with hostility. Thus, negative images for both sides are retained."*
>
> Allana Sampson
>
> University of Victoria

To help Aboriginal clients deal with discrimination, counsellors are encouraged to become familiar with provisions set out by the following legislation:

- Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms
- *Canadian Human Rights Act*
- *Employment Equity Act*
- provincial human rights legislation.

To help clients overcome racism and stereotyping, counsellors can encourage clients to:[71]

- find and/or foster a strong sense of community among other Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people
- educate others about racism by dispelling myths and false images
- focus on accurate facts and details
- communicate assertively and deal with concerns as soon as they arise
- rehearse situations by role-playing
- record specific events in a diary. This may relieve stress and will become a record of specific occurrences.
- work through negative feelings with family, friends and Elders
- contact an appropriate authority including the Human Rights Commission (federal or provincial).

Helping clients with training and education

Considering post-secondary education[72]

Many adult Aboriginal people have not completed secondary education. In order to complete the post-secondary training required to enter many occupations, Aboriginal clients may need to:

- repeat or upgrade their secondary education
- compete to enter programs for which quotas exist and entrance requirements are rising
- prepare for long periods of extensive study.

> "When Aboriginal students enter post-secondary institutions, it is important to connect with them early. They need to know someone cares about them being successful. Some institutions foster a sense of community by providing a place for Aboriginal students to connect with each other, meet with Elders, hold sweet grass ceremonies and access computers."
> Diana Blackman
> Northern Alberta Institute of Technology

Aboriginal clients, who have not observed community or family members facing the challenges of a post-secondary program, may not have a clear picture of the commitment and work required. Talking with a role model will help to ensure they don't underestimate the challenges involved.

Expanded opportunities for education and training

There are increasing numbers of programs available that focus on providing Aboriginal people with opportunities to gain skills through education and training. Alberta Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development "works with industry, Aboriginal groups and provincial departments to develop partnerships to enhance training, employment and business opportunities for Aboriginal people."[73]

Many industries involved in developing new business projects are now required to give back to affected communities in the form of:[74]

- training projects
- scholarships and bursaries
- mentorship
- employment opportunities.

It is important for counsellors to be aware of new opportunities and related guidelines for Aboriginal clients.

Program eligibility and funding

Program eligibility and funding guidelines vary from program to program.

Because eligibility and funding issues can be particularly complex, counsellors have a responsibility to help clients understand what programs they may or may not qualify for. It is also very important for counsellors to understand the differences between First Nations, Métis and Inuit in order to assist clients with the self-identification process, if necessary. The following are some criteria that may have an impact on program and funding eligibility:[75]

- for First Nations individuals
  - whether they live on or off-reserve
  - whether they are status or non-status.

- for First Nations, Métis and Inuit individuals
  - self-identification (identifying the Aboriginal group they are a member of; some clients may not be sure to which group they belong).

Helping clients plan for education and training

Timelines are another significant consideration for clients planning to enter education and training programs. Many programs, both for funding and training and education, require applications well in advance of start dates—in some cases, up to one year. Counsellors are in a position to help clients understand the importance of these timelines and to help clients plan to meet them. As entrance to various programs becomes more competitive, the demand for clients to become extra diligent in the application process increases.[76]

Helping clients prepare for post-secondary education

Counsellors can help clients prepare for remedial secondary and post-secondary education by ensuring that they are aware of:[77]

- various post-secondary institutions' non-matriculated student policies
- the availability of programs in each institution
- the institutions' acceptance of adult upgrading programs
- the format and flexibility of programs at both the adult upgrading and post-secondary level and how flexibility may allow them to complete a program with fewer restrictions and a higher chance of success.

Helping clients with post-secondary finances[78]

Becoming a student involves expenses including cost of the program and the cost of commuting or moving. Both the status of Aboriginal clients and their planned program of study influence the financial support that might be available. It is important for counsellors to be aware of:

- funding opportunities for status Indians from Indian and Northern Affairs Canada and individual bands
- sponsorship programs at both the federal and provincial level
- scholarships and bursaries
- current student finance policies.

Alternative education opportunities

While continuing their education will be of great benefit to clients, the traditional approach of full-time, on-site attendance may not be the most suitable choice. Clients should become aware of the variety of approaches that they may choose to continue their education:[79]

- Part-time, evening, weekend studies allow students to maintain ongoing family and/or work responsibilities.
- Distance learning or correspondence, including Internet-based schooling, allows students to study without moving to a new location.
- Co-operative education programs, including internships or work experience combine classroom (or distance learning) studies with hands-on experience.
- Apprenticeship programs combine formalized on-the-job training, classroom instruction and standardized examinations.
- Short-term courses focus on specific skill development.

Retention in educational programs

A challenge following enrolment is to provide an environment where Aboriginal people can be successful. Loneliness or lack of a support network may cause students to drop out and not complete their course of studies. Many Aboriginal people are still experiencing poverty that affects the mental, spiritual, emotional and physical aspects of the individual and, therefore, their possibility of success.

To aid retention, educational institutions provide instruction and support in a variety of ways. Some post-secondary institutions have:

- developed courses taught from an Aboriginal perspective and by Aboriginal instructors[80]
- scheduled regular social events, including smudge ceremonies, feasts and student council meetings where those who are interested can attend[81]
- employed Aboriginal liaison staff[82]
- sponsored cultural centres that provide
    - group support
    - inclusive activities especially for rural and off-reserve students.[83]

Developing a resource list[84]

A resource list of agencies, programs and persons that assist Aboriginal people is a useful tool for career counsellors. Because this list will constantly change, it will need to be updated on an ongoing basis. To compile a comprehensive list of resources:

- review the resource list in this chapter
- talk to supervisors and colleagues
- contact local Aboriginal, provincial and/or federal employment centres
- contact government departments and agencies. Federal government departments such as Indian and Northern Affairs Canada may be able to provide lists of services and information. Provincial departments of Aboriginal affairs, human resources, education and social services, as well as municipal social service agencies, may also be helpful.
- contact Native Friendship Centres. Friendship Centres across the country are often involved in lobbying, liaising with government departments,

undertaking advisory tasks and preparing proposals for government programs. The services they offer will vary across the country. Staff members are excellent sources of information.

- read magazines and newspapers (local, Aboriginal, national) and search phone books, databases and catalogues. When searching for information from databases, libraries or the Internet, use keywords such as Aboriginal, Inuit, Métis, First Nations, friendship centres, Indian and Native.

Focusing on Employment

Employment statistics

Statistics Canada information for 2001 reflected that Aboriginal people living in urban settings were faring better than in previous decades. They are, however, still experiencing challenges that are making employment more difficult than for non-Aboriginal people.[85]

> *"Take long enough to get to know the person. It may be hard for some Aboriginal people to open up. Take time to build trust. Find out what challenges clients face. Ask clients—don't make assumptions. Get to the core of personal challenges, point people to appropriate resources. It's very important to help clients identify and address personal challenges prior to dealing with employment."*
>
> Crystal Kosa
>
> Aboriginal Human Resource Development Council of Canada

Employment rates for Aboriginal people provided by Statistics Canada based on the 2001 census were as follows: [86]

- 49.7 per cent of the total Aboriginal population aged 15 years and over were employed compared with 61.8 per cent of non-Aboriginal people of the same age.
- The employment rate for Aboriginal people aged 15 and over reflected a growth of 5.3 percentage points since 1996, more than twice that of the non-Aboriginal population at 2.6 per cent.
- The unemployment rate for Aboriginal people aged 15 and over was 19.1 per cent, while that of non-Aboriginal people was 7.1 per cent.
- The unemployment rate for Aboriginal people dropped 4.9 per cent from 1996 to 2001, a greater decrease than the 2.7 per cent drop in unemployment for the non-Aboriginal population.
- Among Aboriginal groups, the Métis had the highest employment rate at 59.4 per cent, compared with 48.6 per cent for the Inuit and 44.6 per cent for the North American Indians. A higher proportion of Métis people had graduated from high school or completed post-secondary studies.

The following information reflects unemployment figures for Alberta Aboriginal people living off-reserve in December 2005: [87]

- total working age population: 8.6 per cent
- North American Indian: 13.4 per cent
- Métis: 5.2 per cent

The December 2005 unemployment rate for all Aboriginal groups in Alberta was 8.6 per cent[88] compared to 4.1 per cent for all Albertans.[89]

Skill shortages create opportunities

In the May 2005 issue of Labour Market News published by Alberta Human Resources and Employment, the impending labour shortage resulting from more Canadians retiring than entering the workforce was discussed. In 2005, 33 out of 53 occupational groups experienced skills shortages,[90] defined as any occupation with an unemployment rate of three per cent or less. "These shortages, however, can provide opportunities to tap into new labour pools to draw employees. One area in particular that deserves attention is Alberta's Aboriginal population."[91]

Helping clients with work search strategies

To be competitive, clients must develop effective work search skills, including developing strong:[92]

- résumés
- cover letters
- query letters
- information-gathering approaches.

The Aboriginal Human Resource Development Council of Canada provides extensive tips for Aboriginal job seekers.[93] Highlights from these tips follow. Counsellors may find it helpful to share some of this information with clients.

Review self-information

- Revisit what you want to be doing in the future (your vision).
- Take time to build a vision, if you don't have one.
- Ensure the job that you are pursuing moves you closer to your vision.

Take initiative

- Go after the job of your dreams.
- Contact employers who might have openings.
- Show energy and initiative to employers. That will impress them.

Learn about the job market

- Accept that one half of the time you spend job searching should be spent researching the job market, the employers and the skills employers are asking for.
- Become familiar with using computers to do research; this is a useful skill in many jobs.
- Use on-line resources to research work available and skills required.

Network to access the hidden job market

- Brainstorm who you can contact about possible work: classmates from school, neighbours, teachers, fellow employees from previous work and so on.
- Get to know people who work in organizations that are potential employers. Ask them about their jobs, what they do, what they like about their jobs.
- Be specific about your interest in organizations: identify what area you are seeking employment in; request contacts for that area.
- Seize opportunities wherever they present themselves—talk with people who might connect you with potential work at the gym, over coffee, at the grocery store.
- Record your networking efforts, contact names, phone numbers, information gained, etc.
- Follow up with contacts and send thank-you notes to those who provide tips.

Write strong résumés

- Tailor your résumé to a specific job.
- Showcase your strengths, emphasize achievements, initiatives taken, etc.
- Emphasize positive changes that occurred in previous workplaces as a result of your efforts.
- Provide correct and timely contact information, including a contact where messages may be left, as appropriate.
- Prepare a powerful résumé that is no longer than two pages.
- Proofread your résumé to ensure it is free of errors.

Prepare effective cover letters

- Submit a cover letter with every résumé.
- Include information in the cover letter that does not fit in your résumé.
- Write a concise letter no longer than one page.
- Identify the job you are applying for, summarize how your skills match those required for the job, demonstrate your enthusiasm for the work, identify how you can contribute to the organization.
- Proofread your cover letter to ensure it is free of errors.

Prepare for job interviews

- Research the organization and the job itself.
- Anticipate questions you will be asked (lists of frequently asked interview questions can be found on many career websites).
- Prepare and practice responses to anticipated questions.
- Relate your skills to those required by the organization and be ready to provide examples of how you have used your skills.
- Create your own list of questions regarding the job and the organization.

Talk about your Aboriginal heritage—or not

- Plan in advance whether or not you will talk about your Aboriginal heritage.
- Be aware that it may be of benefit to acknowledge your Aboriginal heritage. Many employers may be seeking Aboriginal employees.

Complete the interview successfully

- Dress appropriately; good grooming and dress is a standard for interviews.
- Arrive early for the interview.
- Show enthusiasm and a positive approach. Avoid making any negative comments about previous employment situation, employers and employees.
- Provide examples of how you demonstrate all skills discussed.

Follow up after the interview

- Follow up with a letter after the interview.

Keep your spirits up while searching for work

- Stay positive and use positive self-talk. For example, "I will find a job."
- Accept temporary work.
- Expand your competency base. Continue to develop your skills. (For example, take a night course).
- Set measurable goals, such as making two contacts per day.
- Reward yourself when you meet your goals.
- Continue to network and follow up on all leads for work.

Key retention strategies

Two key retention strategies that are effective in helping Aboriginal employees maintain employment include job orientations provided by employers and mentoring relationships established for new employees.[94]

Employer orientation[95]

Counsellors can help clients by making them aware of the importance of orientation and how it can benefit them. Some smaller organizations may not have formal orientations to the job. In that case, it is helpful when employees are aware of questions they may ask to obtain organizational information. Orientations clarify organizational policies such as:

- absences due to illness, specific days off for family events, holidays, how to report absences, etc.
- discrimination, including who to contact and how.

Counsellors can help clients anticipate challenges they might encounter in the workplace and identify related strategies to address such challenges. For example, a client may have family obligations to a large extended family and attendance at family events may conflict with attendance at work. Through orientation, clients are made aware of organization policies (e.g. in this case, absence policies). Therefore, they will more likely understand expectations, have confidence to ask questions about the policies and make conscious decisions regarding work/life balance and responsibilities.

Mentoring relationships[96]

A second key retention strategy is ensuring new Aboriginal employees are paired with an experienced employee in the workplace. Counsellors can facilitate this process with employers, especially in the absence of a formal mentorship program. It is important that mentors be committed to the mentoring relationship and be familiar with the informal side of the organization. Mentors can help new employees with information such as where to go for coffee and lunch breaks, providing a sense of inclusion. Otherwise, new employees might not ask for social information at work and may end up feeling isolated and lonely.

When orientation and mentoring are in place, new employees are more likely to stay and succeed in the workplace. Orientations, provided by the employer, address the more formal side of employment; mentoring relationships take care of the informal side and establish a more inclusive environment.

In Conclusion

The success of Aboriginal people continues to grow as they achieve higher levels of education and employment. Counsellors can support this continued growth. Those working with Aboriginal people are encouraged to take time to get to know their clients; be aware of Aboriginal culture, while not assuming that all individuals subscribe to any or all traditional cultural practices; and become knowledgeable regarding community resources and opportunities that will help clients move forward in their career choices.

Websites and Resource Organizations

Alberta Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. Retrieved July 16, 2005, from **www.aand.gov.ab.ca**

- responsible for developing Alberta's policies, strategies and initiatives respecting Aboriginal and northern issues

www.aand.gov.ab.ca/PDFs/terms_definitions.pdf

- describes the terms and definitions from the federal *Indian Act*, the *Constitution Act, 1982* and Bill C-31.

www.aand.gov.ab.ca/AAND.asp?lid=122

- check this section of the site for education links, including secondary and post-secondary Aboriginal programs and funding information

Aboriginal Canada Portal. Retrieved July 15, 2005, from **www.aboriginalcanada.gc.ca**

- offers national, provincial and local information about Aboriginal people in Canada and links to resources on a variety of topics

Aboriginal Cultures & Traditions. Retrieved July 16, 2005, from **cado.ayn.ca**

- a digital collection of stories from the First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples of Canada

Aboriginal EnviroCareers. Retrieved July 17, 2005, from **www.beahr.com/aec**

- a resource developed by Building Environmental Aboriginal Human Resources to help Aboriginal educators and students explore environmental careers

Aboriginal Multi-Media Society. Retrieved July 15, 2005, from **www.ammsa.com**

- includes career listings, Aboriginal news and a searchable catalogue of articles on Aboriginal issues

Aboriginal Youth Business Council. Retrieved July 17, 2005, from **www.youthbusiness.com/aybc/main.html**

- a resource site for youth to learn about business created by a non-profit youth council of First Nation, Métis and Inuit entrepreneurs

Aboriginal Youth Info+Net. Retrieved July 16, 2005, from **www.infonet.nextsteps.ca/abjob.html**

- provides Aboriginal youth with general information relating to self-employment, funding, education, training and job search sources in Calgary and the surrounding area

Alberta Human Resources and Employment: First Nations Training-to-Employment. Retrieved July 17, 2005, from **www.gov.ab.ca/hre/firstnations**

- information about how individuals and employers can participate in this program to help First Nations people find and keep meaningful employment

Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission. Retrieved August 4, 2005, from **www.albertahumanrights.ab.ca**

- information about human rights in the workplace, filing complaints, diversity and equality and how to make a difference in the community and the workplace

Alberta Native Friendship Centres Association. Retrieved July 18, 2005, from **www.albertafriendshipcentres.ca**

- dedicated to bridging gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people
- provides information on related programs and services, including links to all Friendship Centres in Alberta

Canadian Forces Aboriginal Entry Program. Retrieved July 16, 2005, from **www.recruiting.forces.gc.ca/engraph/enrollment/index_e.aspx?id=13**

- information about this entry program that allows Aboriginal people to sample military life before joining and make an informed decision about full-time employment in the military

Career Place. Retrieved August 8, 2005, from **www.careerplace.com/splash.jhtml**

- a national career and recruitment site developed to help Aboriginal people find meaningful employment and to help Canadian businesses reach qualified, skilled Aboriginal job seekers (registration is free)

First Nations on SchoolNet. Retrieved August 8, 2005, from **www.schoolnet.ca/aboriginal**

- an Industry Canada initiative to deliver SchoolNet to First Nations schools

Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC). Retrieved July 16, 2005, from **www.ainc-inac.gc.ca**

- provides information about Aboriginal issues, services, culture and history; has links to publications and research; includes a frequently-asked-question section and more
- includes links to employment-related information, including initiatives sponsored by INAC
- provides information on the Land Management Training Program that offers training in administration and management of reserve land. The program is open to First Nations members, First Nation land managers and INAC employees.

Métis National Youth Advisory Council. Retrieved July 7, 2005, from **www.metisyouth.com**

- addresses the needs, concerns and issues facing the youth of the Métis Nation and includes information on programs, awards, scholarships, employment and training opportunities

Métis Settlements General Council. Retrieved July 17, 2005, from **www.msgc.ca**

- has information regarding Métis settlements in Alberta, including legislation and policies

National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation. Retrieved July 16, 2005, from **www.naaf.ca**

- a national not-for-profit organization committed to providing Aboriginal youth the tools to achieve brighter futures and recognizing Aboriginal people who have had outstanding accomplishments
- includes information and applications for a variety of projects and awards for Aboriginal youth

National Association of Friendship Centres. Retrieved August 8, 2005, from **www.nafc-aboriginal.com**

- committed to improving the quality of life for Aboriginal people in urban environments
- includes information regarding programs and services and links to Friendship Centres throughout Canada

Possibilities Project: Aboriginal Links. Retrieved August 8, 2005, from **www.possibilitiesproject.com/verc/links/firstpeoples.asp**

- a Toronto-based site that includes links to a variety of employment, education and information of interest to Aboriginal people

RCMP K Division Aboriginal Policing Services. Retrieved July 16, 2005, from **www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/ab/prog_serv/aboriginal_e.htm**

- information on the RCMP K Division Aboriginal Policing Services and the Aboriginal Police Studies Program initiated in 2002

The Aboriginal Human Resource Development Council of Canada. Retrieved July 15, 2005, from **www.ahrdcc.com**

- a national organization that works through public and private sector partnerships to develop innovative employment solutions for Aboriginal people. The site provides a variety of resources for employers, Aboriginal job seekers and career counsellors

The Aboriginal Inclusion Network. Retrieved August 9, 2005, from **www.inclusionnetwork.ca**

- an Aboriginal career website connecting Canadian employers to Aboriginal talent
- allows Aboriginal candidates to create profiles for free, post résumés and perform customized searches; allows employers to post jobs for a low fee

The Aboriginal Workforce Participation Initiative. Retrieved July 16, 2005, from **www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ai/awpi/tkt_e.html**

- provides national and regional information about the demographic and economic diversity of Aboriginal people
- guides employers that are developing their own customized approach to hiring and retraining employees

The Métis Nation of Alberta. Retrieved July 17, 2005, from **www.albertametis.com**

- information on the Métis Nation of Alberta, including programs and services offered by the Métis Employment Service centres across the province

The University of Alberta School of Native Studies. Retrieved July 15, 2005, from **www.ualberta.ca/nativestudies**

- includes information on the Bachelor of Arts in Native Studies offered by the University of Alberta as well as links to department research and various Internet resources
- includes maps of reserves and Métis settlements in Alberta

ThinkTrades: Alberta Aboriginal Apprenticeship Project. Retrieved July 17, 2005, from **www.thinktrades.com**

- helps Aboriginal people enter and complete apprenticeship programs and includes information for counsellors, employers and candidates

Windspeaker. Retrieved August 8, 2005, from **ww.ammsa.com/windspeaker/index.htm**

- a national Aboriginal news source

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CHAPTER 2

Ex-offenders

WHATWORKS?

Career–building Strategies for People From Diverse Groups

Ex-offenders

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What do I wish I would have known when I first started working with persons who have been in conflict with the law?

"... how important it is to leave your biases at the door and deal with clients where they are today and not to focus on where they have come from, their offences and their violation of society. When you do that, you're keeping them in the past and getting in the way of them moving forward."

Jackie Mah

Edmonton John Howard Society

Introduction

Statistics

Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada provides the following information regarding incarceration in Canada:

- "In 2002, the incarceration rate in Canada was 116 per 100,000 general population.
- Canada's incarceration rate is higher than the rates in most Western European countries but much lower than the United States, which had an incarceration rate of 702 per 100,000 general population in 2002.
- The incarceration rate has decreased in Canada since the mid 1990s and has remained steady since 2000 whereas most Western European rates have remained stable or increased during the same time period."[1]

Some additional statistics include:

- Women make up four per cent of Canada's federal offender population.[2] They are also the fastest growing prison population worldwide.[3]
- The rate of women charged with violent crimes has been steadily increasing while the rate of men charged with violent crimes peaked in 1993 and has since been decreasing.[4]
- Aboriginal Peoples represent 2.8 per cent of the Canadian population but account for 18 per cent of the federal prison population.[5]
- Up to 50 per cent of prisoners have an anti-social personality disorder.[6]
- "Over half (55.6 per cent) of all custodial sentences imposed by adult courts are less than one month."[7]
- "Of all convictions that result in custody, only 3.7 per cent result in federal jurisdiction (i.e., a sentence of two years or more)."[8]

Terminology and definitions

In work with clients who have been in conflict with the law, counsellors may encounter ex-offenders who have been involved with the federal and/or provincial justice systems. Following is some background information and related definitions:[9]

At the federal government level

- The federal government normally provides correctional programs to convicted offenders who have been sentenced to incarceration of two years or greater.
- Federal sentences are served in penitentiaries.

- **Parole**: Offenders approved for a period of community supervision as part of their sentence are placed on parole.
  - Full parole: Offenders being supervised on full parole are not required to report back regularly to a correctional facility.
  - Day parole: Offenders on day parole are normally required to report back daily to a community residential facility, a halfway house or day release centre.
- **Statutory release**: Offenders incarcerated in a federal penitentiary are normally eligible for release under supervision to the community on their statutory release date, the point at which they have served two-thirds of their sentence. Usually these are offenders who did not apply for or were denied parole.

At the provincial government level

- The provincial government provides correctional programs to those offenders who have been sentenced to periods of incarceration of less than two years or who received community sentences, such as fines, community service or probation.
- The provincial correctional service administers all young offender sentences. Young offenders may serve terms longer than two years in provincial custody.
- Provincial sentences are served in remand centres, correctional centres and young offender centres.
- **Probation**: Probation is a disposition of the court, usually ordered in conjunction with a conditional discharge or a suspended sentence where the offender is required to adhere to court-ordered conditions as part of the sentence. The conditions are set out in the probation order and may include the requirement to report to a probation officer.

General Characteristics

A majority of offenders come from economically and socially disadvantaged backgrounds. Characteristics that may relate but not be limited to ex-offenders' rehabilitation are:

- emotional instability
- marginality
- lack of vocational skills
- lack of support systems
- negative or deviant self-concept and work attitude.[10]

Inmates, particularly those in federal institutions, have the opportunity to participate in a number of programs. While incarcerated, they have access to employment, academic, substance abuse awareness and other psycho-educational programs. Participation in such programs can help address behaviours and issues that may interfere with gaining and maintaining employment upon release.

Prisonization effect

"Although there have not been very many studies conducted on the psychological effects of prison, there has always been an understanding of the sociological consequences that the atmosphere of a controlled isolated space can have on inmates."[11] The term, prisonization, is used to describe the ex-offender's acceptance of criminals as the key reference group and acceptance of the institutional culture, which is a significant factor in understanding an ex-offender's adjustment to release. The "prisonization effect" negatively impacts recidivism and employability after offenders are released."[12]

A broad definition of recidivism:

"anyone...released into the community and subsequently readmitted to a federal (or provincial) institution. This includes, for example, not only those...readmitted for new offences but also those...readmitted for technical violations of their release conditions (with no new offences)."[13]

Correctional Service of Canada

Relationship issues

Many clients who have been in conflict with the law experience difficulty establishing and maintaining relationships both in and outside of the work environment. For many, issues related to their history with family and friends have left them with few supports. Women, particularly, require and appreciate attention to the building of the client-counsellor relationship. Trust is frequently an issue and building trust is a process that requires time.[14]

Lack of self-direction

During incarceration, the decisions that offenders are allowed to make are limited. The institutional model focuses on managing the population as a whole, as opposed to managing independent individuals. "Inmates are expected to be followers and make few decisions of their own."[15] The transition from the institution to the community, including employment, challenges ex-offenders to assume control and take responsibility for themselves, their actions and the direction of their lives.

Literacy issues

"Approximately 55% of inmates entering CSC [Correctional Service of Canada] institutions test at lower than Grade 10 literacy levels and approximately 80% do not have a High School Diploma. Research has established that education is an important way to help offenders successfully prepare for their safe return to the community. The inability to read and write may not be a specific cause of criminal behaviour, but it can make daily life difficult and correctional programming less productive. It also limits employment options upon an offender's release."[16]

Skill building on the inside

CORCAN is a Correctional Service of Canada rehabilitation program that provides employment training and employability skills to offenders in federal correctional institutions.[17]

CORCAN's five business lines include:

- agribusiness
- textiles
- manufacturing
- construction
- maintenance and services (e.g. printing, scanning and laundry).

CORCAN strives for a realistic work environment and operates its shops in as business-like a fashion as possible. Most shops are ISO certified. Most CORCAN products are used internally with the Correctional Service of Canada; the rest are marketed to the public sector.[18]

Through their employment with CORCAN, offenders gain valuable training and work experience. They can earn certification related to training they have completed. For example, certification can be earned in industrial first aid, Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS), forklift operation, heavy equipment driving and cooking, among others. Offenders may also be required to complete academic, substance abuse awareness and/or psycho-educational programs. They may also earn certificates or documentation related to these programs.[19]

In summary, ex-offenders, especially those who have been incarcerated in federal institutions, may have been employed or have completed a variety of programs while incarcerated. It will be helpful to check with clients regarding any programs, training and employment they were involved in while incarcerated as well as any related certificates and documentation they may have earned.

Challenges facing clients who are ex-offenders

Ex-offenders face a number of external and internal challenges to successful work search and employment. While some of these challenges relate to personal issues and a lack of education and training, experts in the field[20] identify the following additional challenges ex-offenders face upon release:

- transportation
  - may not have a driver's licence due to suspension and/or outstanding fines
  - may not have sufficient funds to use public transportation
- identification and documentation
  - may not have identification such as a birth certificate, driver's licence
  - unable to apply for Alberta health benefits without a birth certificate
- work apparel
  - may not have appropriate work apparel
- tools
  - may not have tools required for some work, for example, trades work
- shelter
  - may not have adequate or permanent shelter
- telephone
  - may not have access to telephone services
- bank account
  - may have difficulty opening a bank account due to:[21]
    - lack of acceptable identification
    - reason to believe they may use the account to break the law
    - may have committed a crime against the bank
    - may have reason to believe employees or customers would be exposed to physical harm, harassment or abuse
  - employers paying through direct deposit require employees to have bank accounts.

> *"In corrections work it is easy to ignore the fact that every individual also possesses some strengths, no matter how tenuous …Most of the women are so used to talking about their problems that when you first ask them to speak about their strengths they are somewhat taken aback. In order to utilize this perspective it is necessary to suspend the belief that the woman may never 'amount to anything.' This means that you have to assume that the women know something and have learned from their life experiences. The parolee also needs to believe that you respect them and think that they can build something out of their lives."*
>
> Rebecca Deguara
>
> Correctional Service of Canada[22]

Using a strength-based approach: Suggested interview questions

Rebecca Deguara of the Correctional Service of Canada provides some valuable insights into using a strength-based approach with women who have been in conflict with the law. Although her work has been with women offenders, it is assumed that the same strength-based approach may also be effective with male offenders. Deguara advocates using a strength-based approach as well as continuing to address issues that may have led to the offence. For example, she incorporates relapse prevention techniques to assist clients in dealing with substance abuse issues. She has found this strength-based approach to be "refreshingly positive" and has found that it "often opens the door to new possibilities."[23] Saleebey, as cited in Deguara, suggests using the following types of interview questions (and provides examples of each) to facilitate client identification of strengths:

- "*Survival questions*—e.g. Given what you have gone through in your life, how have you managed to survive so far?
- *Support questions*—e.g. What people have given you special understanding, support, guidance?
- *Possibility questions*—e.g. What are your hopes, visions, aspirations?
- *Esteem questions*—e.g. When people say good things about you, what are they likely to say?
- *Exception questions*—e.g. When things were going well in your life, what was different?" [24]

Counsellors may have noted that the questions identified above can be used effectively with all clients, although this application focuses on clients who have been in conflict with the law. Using strength-based interview strategies such as those identified above lays a valuable base for career building and offers the following outcomes:

- establishes a client-focused, collaborative process with clients
- empowers clients by facilitating self-identification of strengths
- reinforces client autonomy.

Strength-based strategies are most effective when they are woven throughout all of your interactions with clients. They are not stand-alone strategies but are part of the larger whole of the career-building process.

First things first and…it's not always employment

"Employment is one of the most important vehicles for assisting re-entry," asserts Petersilia, as cited in Rossman and Roman.[25]At the same time, rushing clients who have been in conflict with the law into a search for immediate full-time employment may, in fact, be setting them up for further challenges, as these clients frequently have other issues that must be addressed prior to moving into full-time employment. One very important issue is the impact of release conditions that clients must adhere to.[26] Additional issues such as substance abuse, a need for enhanced basic living skills and anger management, among others, should be considered during the career-building process with clients.[27] The counsellor's role will be to support clients by providing referrals to appropriate community resources and agencies.

Building relationships

As suggested previously, some experts in the field have found that, especially for female clients, building relationships is important. As trust is frequently an issue, relationship building with these clients takes time. However, by taking time to build such a relationship, counsellors can serve as a model for clients to use in building and maintaining other healthy relationships.[28]

Conditions of release

As a career counsellor, it is likely that you will see clients who are under some type of mandated supervision, such as parole, and who are subject to conditions of release. Offenders must comply with such conditions. Fulfilling them may interfere with or eliminate the option of full-time employment. Determining whether a client's release is subject to conditions is extremely important. An offender may be subject to one or several conditions of release, such as the following:[29]

- abstaining from intoxicants
- disclosing finances
- attending psychiatric counselling
- disclosing intimate relationships
- not being alone with individuals under the age of 18.

Below is an example of the impact of an inappropriate employment situation for an offender whose release is subject to conditions.

- An ex-offender employed at a convenience store is left alone in the store. A sixteen-year-old customer enters the store. The employee is now in violation of a condition of his release: he may not be alone with individuals under the age of 18.

Some helpful points to remember when working with clients who may be subject to conditions of release:

- Determine if the client is subject to conditions of release and identify the conditions.
- Determine the name of the client's parole officer.
- Communicate with the parole officer and any other individuals from supporting agencies or programs to ensure a collaborative approach to employing the client.

Substance abuse issues

For clients dealing with substance abuse issues, a first step in moving forward involves making a commitment to address their addictions. "…[D]rug treatment programs do work in easing the transition from prison to the community."[30] Experts in the field offer the following information:[31]

- Participation in a substance abuse treatment program may be a condition of release.
- Treatment programs may require full-time attendance, which precludes work search or maintaining full-time employment.
- For counsellors, familiarity with information related to substance abuse issues, the effects of specific substances and related community resources is very helpful.
- For clients not mandated to attend substance abuse treatment programs, counsellors can provide referrals, information and support, but the commitment to treatment programs must be by client choice.

> *"Dealing with addictions is a huge challenge. Change takes time and I like to encourage my clients to be patient with themselves, to give themselves a break."*
> Jackie Norman
> Elizabeth Fry Society of Edmonton

Life skills training

Focusing on transition to work, Rossman and Roman[32] identify the importance of building life skills training into pre-release or immediate post-release programs. For clients who have not had the opportunity to develop these skills, participating in life skills training is a significant step forward that will build a stronger base for successful entry into employment. According to Rossman and Roman, the following are important components of such training:

- appropriate workplace attitudes and behaviour, including punctuality and communication skills
- money management, including budgeting and opening and managing bank accounts
- time management

- practical problem-solving skills for independent living in the community
- work search skills, including finding and keeping a job.

Helping clients with self-worth issues

Self-worth and human relationship issues and related skills and competencies are identified below. Experts in the field[33] endorse the value of addressing these topics with persons who have been in conflict with the law:

- self-esteem
- communication skills
- assertiveness
- anger
- stress
- decision-making.

The following section outlines approaches and exercises designed specifically for clients who are ex-offenders. While it is not expected that you will cover all or, perhaps, any of this content directly with clients, it will be helpful to be aware of topic areas and issues relevant to clients who are ex-offenders. With clients' agreement, you may wish to use some of these ideas in your career-building process.

Self-esteem

Incarceration can have a profound effect on self-esteem in areas such as dependency, expressing feelings, loss of control, success and physical withdrawal. To help clients address self-esteem issues:

- Examine with clients the sources of self-esteem (positive and negative) in childhood, from family and school.
- Have clients make a list of their accomplishments. This, and all other exercises could be written or recorded.
- Have clients create letters of appreciation to themselves that recognize their positive qualities.
- Help clients create lists of positive affirmations that they can say aloud daily to build self-esteem.
- Encourage clients to keep journals as a place in which to release feelings, solve problems and understand relationships. The journal could be recorded rather than written.

Communication skills

- Review the skills involved with effective listening.
- Teach clients how to use "I" messages and have them practise between meetings.
- Show clients how to clarify and paraphrase.
- Discuss nonverbal communication.

Assertiveness

- Examine with clients what being assertive means (e.g. standing up for yourself, saying no without hurting others or putting them down, telling others how you feel without hurting them or putting them down).
- Discuss the differences between assertive, aggressive and passive behaviour.
- Have clients record three situations between meetings: one each in which they were assertive, aggressive and passive. Analyse the outcome of each situation.
- Help clients draft an "Assertiveness Bill of Rights."
- Role play and, between sessions, have clients practise:
  - making and refusing requests
  - dealing with put-downs and criticism
  - giving and receiving compliments.

Anger[34]

Clients who require more in-depth assistance will benefit from an anger management program. In general, covering the following points with clients in regard to anger will be helpful:

- Dealing with anger in employment situations.
- Developing techniques for self-control.
- Recognizing that anger:[35]
  - is a normal emotion
  - often covers up another emotion, such as fear, frustration or sadness
  - can be constructive when it signals us to take some action against injustice, abuse, annoyance or fuels accomplishment
  - is a problem if it is too frequent, lasts too long, leads to aggression or disturbs work or personal relationships.

Stress[36]

Clients who require more in-depth assistance will benefit from a stress reduction program. In general, counsellors can:

- Help clients recognize the negative and positive effects of stress.
- Help clients assess the level of stress in their lives and recognize common responses to stress.
- Emphasize that dealing with stress involves three choices:
  - changing what causes the stress
  - changing responses to the stress
  - exploring strategies for managing stress.

- Show clients relaxation exercises and encourage them to practise.
- Discuss how diet and exercise can positively affect stress levels.
- Draw up a stress reduction contract with clients. The contract could be general or specific (e.g. to address a specific job search event, such as going for an interview).

Decision making[37]

- Help clients recognize that decision making is an activity they are involved in every day.
- Review with clients how they presently make decisions.
- Emphasize that effective decision making is a skill that can be learned.
- Show that many different approaches can be used. Having clients consider priorities, values and impact on self and others is key.
- Provide suggestions and opportunities to practise decision making during the counselling process and in the course of their normal activities.

Beginning a career-building plan

In addition to addressing self-worth issues, ensure clients' basic needs are being addressed. Each of the interventions below can become a step in clients' career-building process:[38]

- Financial needs. Clients may have very few financial resources. Facilitate client applications for income support and other community agencies where appropriate. This may include referrals to temporary employment agencies if clients are not subject to conditions of release that would interfere and if there are no additional barriers to temporary employment.
- Housing. Securing appropriate housing can be very challenging for ex-offenders, particularly if recently released. They may have limited financial resources, which compounds the problem. Providing referral to any assistance programs and/or low-income housing will be helpful.
- Training programs. Some clients may require life skills training and work-related skill building prior to securing employment. Financial support or sponsorship in a training program will give them the time to gain the skills they require to enter the workforce.
- Support. It will also be important to support clients in establishing new relationships in the community. Participating in training programs, even of a short-term nature, provide an effective place to start building new relationships.
- Brainstorm additional strategies to meet new people. Special interest clubs may provide another alternative.
- Establish contact with clients' case management officers (for federal offenders). Case management officers may help reintegrate the person into the community and co-ordinate a training plan. Federal offenders should be able to identify their case management officer or parole officer.

Focusing on Employment

Key skills identified by ex-offenders for ex-offenders

The following information may be useful as a checklist to help counsellors ensure that they are working with clients in areas of employability most meaningful to them. This list, developed in 1992, continues to be recognized and valued in the field today.[39] These 36 skills were identified by ex-offenders as instrumental in making a successful transition from incarceration to employment on the outside. Listed in their words, the key skills are:[40]

Human relationship skills

- self-esteem
- communication skills

- assertiveness skills
- establishing a personal support system: help clients develop a network of family, friends and others who will help them reach their personal goals
- helping others
- working with others: help clients learn to get along with supervisors and co-workers and provide service for customers
- skills for overcoming unfairness: help clients deal with the fact that sometimes people may treat them unfairly based on who they think they are, not on who they really are.

Self-management skills

- problem-solving/decision-making skills
- recognizing their limits: help clients know what they are capable of undertaking at any particular time
- work and lifestyle balance: help clients sort and manage their personal and work responsibilities in a manner that's appropriate for them
- living skills: ensure clients can look after their basic needs
- appearance and dress skills: help clients present themselves in the workplace in a manner that is appropriate for the job and its safety requirements
- managing addictions: help clients recognize and find help to deal with their addictions
- time management skills
- stress management skills
- anger management skills
- money management skills: help clients learn to live on the money they are/will be earning.

Planning and goal setting skills

- career-setting goals
- trying new things: help clients to be open to new experiences and people
- accepting setbacks: help clients learn from experiences
- adaptability skills: help clients make changes to reach goals.

Employment-related skills

- basic skills: help clients to find literacy programs, if necessary
- job specific skills
- developing personal strengths: help clients to see the benefits of ongoing personal growth
- showing a positive work attitude
- independence and initiative
- dependability
- integrity
- concern for quality
- staying motivated: help clients put jail behind them and focus on the present, give themselves a chance
- commitment to an employer
- ability to use training opportunities.

> *"A supportive community is critical to the re-integration of offenders."*
> Nancy Stabelforth
> Correctional Service of Canada[41]

Dealing with employer issues

In their American study, Giguere and Dundes[42] found that a majority (53 per cent) of employers were willing to hire an ex-offender described in a hypothetical scenario. But however willing an employer may be to hire an ex-offender, common misperceptions can still create barriers for ex-offenders seeking employment. Practitioners working with ex-offenders continue to find relevant the 1989 research published by Henry and Odiorne.[43] In the following piece, they list and refute misinformation about ex-offenders that employers commonly hold:

1. All offenders are alike.

- Hardened, habitual criminals who make up a small percentage of those incarcerated, usually do not want to work.
- White-collar criminals, car thieves, minor drug and political offenders differ from hardened criminals in their offences, motives and potential for rehabilitation.

2. Ex-offenders have no useful skills.

- On-the-job training and educational opportunities are available for many inmates.
- Prison industries may offer opportunities to build valuable work-related skills.

3. Educated people don't go to jail.

- White-collar criminals are a growing population. They usually express gratitude at being hired, display outstanding co-operation and work habits in post-discharge jobs. They are eager to rebuild their lives.

White-collar crime defined...

"...nonviolent crimes committed by corporations or individuals such as office workers or sales personnel in the course of their business activities. White-collar crimes include embezzlement, false advertising, bribery, unfair competition, tax evasion, and unfair labour practices."[44]

4. Ex-offenders can't hold down a job.

- Most offenders had jobs at the time of their arrest and most had above average work records.
- Case studies from companies that hire significant numbers of ex-offenders reveal a lower than normal turnover rate.

5. Co-workers won't accept ex-offenders as fellow employees.

- Employees should be judged on the quality of their work, their willingness to co-operate, their attitude and their competence.
- Most employees object to the presence of another worker only if she or he has a detrimental effect on them, their work or their job arrangements.

6. Employees who are ex-offenders need special monitoring.

- Ex-offenders, after typical orientation and training, need the same level of supervision as other employees.
- Ex-offenders usually welcome the opportunity to blend in with the rest of the workforce.
- Ex-offenders do not need special privileges.
- Ex-offenders with outside responsibilities, such as a family to support or employment as a condition of parole, are usually eager to succeed.

Using every appropriate opportunity to educate employers and the public about hiring ex-offenders will help to counter the misinformation that often provides a significant challenge for this client group. In addition:

- Remind clients that there are many employers who will hire ex-offenders.
- Provide examples of such employers.
- Provide anonymous examples of previous clients (ex-offenders) who have successfully gained and maintained employment.

"The number one fear for my clients is looking for work because of the rejection they might have to face if they don't get hired."

Jackie Norman

Elizabeth Fry Society of Edmonton

Continuing the career-building process: Tips and strategies[45]

Once they assist clients with the core issues discussed previously, counsellors will be ready to move forward with the career-building process:

- Help clients identify their preferred futures and options related to those preferred futures.
- Have clients brainstorm the ways in which having a criminal record might impact work options they have identified, as well as their work search and related employment. Some work options may require criminal record checks and, therefore, may not be available to particular clients. Ensure that all career and work search planning meets the clients' conditions of release.
- Become aware, and help clients become aware, of education and training programs and on-the-job training opportunities that require criminal record checks. For example, some public sector jobs,

health-related programs and programs involving working with children require criminal records checks.

- Continue to collaborate with clients' parole officers and/or other agencies and programs.
- Help clients access relevant skill-building programs and funding for such programs.

When exploring career options...

"I question what is behind the (client's) choice. What is it that they like about that area? I don't want to dash their dreams. I want to help them explore options to get into that (preferred) area."

Jackie Mah

Edmonton John Howard Society

Work search

Clients who are ex-offenders are likely to benefit from assistance in building their work search skills. Some suggestions follow:[46]

- Help clients to apply for jobs they are interested in and determine the duties and qualifications required.
- Help clients become aware of the hidden job market and help them develop strategies for accessing it.
- When transportation is an issue, encourage clients to use the telephone to gather information from and follow-up with employers. Encourage clients to fax their résumés rather than delivering them in person. Refer clients to local resources that can provide free access to telephones, faxes and computers for their job search (e.g. government employment offices, non-profit agencies or offices contracted to provide such services).
- Help clients pursue volunteer opportunities, part-time or temporary work, work experience programs and/or applicable government placement programs. (Remember to confirm whether a criminal records check is required.)
- Encourage clients to consider casual labour or employment with a temporary agency. These options are good starting points for ex-offenders because they provide a transition into employment and allow clients flexibility if they are attending programs and/or require time to build their confidence in the workplace.
- Assist clients who are parents with child care issues through referrals and information about child care options.
- Help clients, for whom housing is an issue, to find permanent housing, especially those living in homeless shelters. Clients in such accommodation may face great challenges maintaining employment. Given that their nightly accommodation is temporary, they must carry all their possessions with them everywhere, including to work. Many places of employment do not provide for storage.
- Help clients obtain appropriate apparel for interviews and work. Offer referrals to community agencies that provide appropriate clothing. Some work may require special clothing such as steel-toed boots and hard hats. Help clients access any funding available to obtain these safety items.

Résumé building

The following are some suggestions for helping clients with building a résumé:

- Help clients identify skills and strengths using strength-based questions. Examples of such questions can be found in the section *Using a strength-based approach: Suggested interview questions* in this chapter.
- Focus on transferable skills.
- Include skill-building experiences and any certification earned during incarceration.
- Use a functional résumé.[47]

Client disclosure of a criminal record

Discuss with clients the issue of disclosing their criminal record to an employer:[48]

- Facilitate discussions with clients regarding the impact of disclosure.
- Have clients brainstorm all the possible outcomes of disclosure/nondisclosure to an employer.

- If clients choose to disclose their criminal records to employers, help them review the anticipated scenario, what they might say and the negative and positive reactions an employer may have.
- If clients choose not to disclose their criminal record, facilitate a related discussion including strategies for handling situations where the client's employer or colleagues become aware of their criminal record.

Post-employment support[49]

Once clients find employment, they may need ongoing support to help them maintain this employment. They may experience difficulties in their employment related to issues of self-worth (i.e. self-esteem, communication, assertiveness, anger and stress management and decision-making). Such issues may not have emerged during the career-building process and only become evident when a situation arises at the workplace.

Post-employment support may involve facilitating, discussing, brainstorming, explaining and debriefing. Areas where further intervention may be required could include:

- dispute resolution (between your client and a co-worker or the employer)
- investigating options and consequences
- understanding workplace expectations, norms or culture
- transitioning to workplace routines
- understanding their rights (i.e. employment standards)
- exploring how to leave employment appropriately.

And one last word for counsellors...

"Don't get in over your head. Keep your boundaries and ethics in place. And, always reach out and get help when you need it."

Jackie Mah

Edmonton John Howard Society

In Conclusion

Counsellors can be of great assistance to clients who have been in conflict with the law. While this chapter provides career-building information and strategies that will assist those working with this client group, practitioners[50] encourage you to build relationships with, and access support and further information from, others experienced in the field. Consult with parole/probation officers and other professionals working with clients and refer clients to appropriate resources for assistance in areas beyond the scope of your experience.

Websites and Resource Organizations

Alberta Correctional Education Association. Retrieved April 28, 2005, from **www.nald.ca/acea/index.html**

- dedicated to the academic, vocational and personal development of incarcerated persons and the professional enhancement of its members
- information regarding the association, as well as journal and newsletter articles and links to related education resources

Alberta Justice. Retrieved April 28, 2005, from **www.justice.gov.ab.ca**

- information about the Justice ministry and justice issues, as well as a searchable database and topics by subject area

Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies. Retrieved April 21, 2005, from **www.elizabethfry.ca**

- association of self-governing, community-based Elizabeth Fry societies that work with and for women and girls in the justice system
- includes a list of the community-based offices throughout the country and links to articles and resources on issues such as violence against women and children, literacy in prison, etc.

CORCAN. Retrieved April 21, 2005, from **www.csc-scc.gc.ca/text/prgrm/corcan/home_e.shtml**

- an agency of the Correctional Service of Canada
- information regarding CORCAN programs and services

Correctional Service of Canada. Retrieved April 22, 2005, from **www.csc-scc.gc.ca**

- information on national issues related to corrections, including news releases, research documents, publications and links to federal, provincial and territorial justice sites
- includes a list of nongovernment, cross-cultural and international justice links

Family & Corrections Network. Retrieved April 24, 2005, from **www.fcnetwork.org**

- information for and about families of offenders, containing articles, newsletters and links to related sites

The John Howard Society of Alberta. Retrieved April 21, 2005, from **www.johnhoward.ab.ca**

- information and links to related research and publications including *A Guide to Pardons, Understanding Criminal Records, etc.*

The John Howard Society of Canada. Retrieved April 21, 2005, from **www.johnhoward.ca**

- federation of provincial, territorial and local societies that work with those in conflict with the law, advocate changes to the criminal justice process and engage in public education on matters involving criminal law
- includes a list of all offices and related services across Canada and links to briefs, position papers and sites related to criminal justice and drug policy issues

Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada. Retrieved April 21, 2005, from **www.sgc.gc.ca**

- information regarding public safety issues including corrections, national security, policing and criminal justice
- includes a database of publications and fact sheets

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CHAPTER 3

Gender

WHATWORKS:

Career–building Strategies for People From Diverse Groups

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Gender

> *"Dramatic demographic, social and economic changes of the past few decades have…led to what has aptly been described as a work and lifestyle 'revolution' (Vanderkolk & Young, 1991). There are now more:*
>
> 1. dual-income families,
> 2. working heads of single-parent families,
> 3. working women of all ages,
> 4. working mothers, particularly mothers of young children,
> 5. men with direct responsibility for family care,
> 6. workers caring for elderly parents or relatives, and
> 7. workers in the sandwich generation with responsibility for both child care and elder care.
>
> The workforce of today is also older and more ethnically diverse than in the past."
>
> Public Health Agency of Canada[1]

Introduction

In previous editions of this resource, the name of this chapter was *Women*, reflecting the fact that women tend to experience significant employment-related issues. This phenomenon is well supported in the literature. Men, on the other hand, particularly Caucasian males have not experienced the same degree of employment-related issues according to the literature. Certainly, males of other ethnic origins, or those belonging to any of the groups included in other chapters of this resource, are more likely to experience such issues, and career-building strategies appropriate to their circumstances will be found in related chapters.

The literature does reflect increased discussion regarding the changing role of men in society: the movement away from the role of sole provider for their families, the apparent reluctance of men to seek counselling and the relationship of gender to occupational choice. These issues will be included in this chapter.

Consequently, while this chapter will focus on both women and men and issues related to work and career choices, the content will be somewhat weighted towards women, reflecting the information available in the literature.

Statistics

Employment-related statistics

Women continue to participate somewhat less than men in the workforce. In 2003, women represented 47 per cent of the employed workforce in Canada.[2] On the other hand, for those participating, the unemployment rate was similar to that of men, in fact, slightly lower in one reporting group. For the year 2004, Statistics Canada[3] reported the following for the Canadian population, 15 years and over:

- The population, 15 years and over, consisted of 12,510,800 men and 12,921,800 women.
- The labour force participation rate was 73.3 per cent for men and 62.1 per cent for women.
- The employment rate was 67.8 per cent for men and 57.8 per cent for women.
- The unemployment rate was 7.5 per cent for men and 6.8 per cent for women.

The same report provides information regarding the province of Alberta:[4]

- The population, 15 years and over, consisted of 1,261,700 men and 1,243,400 women.
- The labour force participation rate was 79.7 per cent for men and 67.3 per cent for women.
- The employment rate was 76.1 per cent for men and 64.2 per cent for women.
- The unemployment rate was 4.6 per cent for men and 4.7 per cent for women.

Average earnings

Average earnings for Canadian men and women continue to reflect a large discrepancy, with the men's average being consistently higher over a 10-year period:[5]

- In 1994, the average earnings were $36,700 for men and $22,200 for women.
- In 2003, the average earnings had grown to $39,100 for men and $24,800 for women.

Average earnings for various types of families in Canada may also be of interest. Approximate figures for 2001 are:[6]

- non-elderly* married couples with children at home: $80,000
- non-elderly married couples without children at home: $70,000
- female-headed, lone parent families: $32,000
- male-headed, lone parent families: $50,000

General Characteristics

"If we view 'career' as encompassing all facets of our lives from birth until death, it is apparent that women will face decisions that are different from their male counterparts. This is not to say that men and women cope with totally different decisions, but rather that they may have different priorities, needs and life roles. These differences have been influenced by societal expectation and life experiences."[7]

Gender and occupational choice

The previous statistics reinforce that traditional gender-related occupational choices continue to dominate for both men and women.

"…the contents of people's imaginings of the future are strongly influenced by sociocultural factors, such as sex role prescriptions and other norms and expectations that mark the particular context in which one lives…There is also evidence that peoples' future orientations reflect the roles and possibilities defined for them by their culture."[8]

Gender and values

"The participation rates of women in occupations traditionally held by men have increased dramatically in the past three decades. However, these changes have been uneven, e.g., many more women are becoming doctors and lawyers, but not engineers. Furthermore, men have not flocked into the occupations traditionally held by women. While these differences undoubtedly persist for many reasons, one reason is a gender difference in values…"[9]

"[T]he differences in values held by females and males are due to the social context in which they develop…."[10] Davey, as cited in Davey and Lalande (2004), suggests that women tend to give altruistic reasons for their occupational choices while men are more likely to relate these choices to their interests.[11] Relational values (concern for others) were found to be important to female students in more traditional majors such as nursing and social work. On the other hand, female students in non-traditional majors, including engineering and science, tended to value achievement, responsibility, independence and financial prosperity.[12]

> *"Whereas women who choose to enter male-dominated occupations are generally viewed as making a positive career move that offers increased opportunities for pay, advancement, and status (Hayes, 1986), the same perceptions do not hold true for men who enter female-dominated or non-traditional occupations. Men who enter traditionally female occupations face lower status and lower financial rewards. (Chusmir, 1990; Hayes, 1989); they may also find their abilities, masculinity, and even sexual orientation questioned (Chusmir, 1990; Hayes, 1986)."*
>
> Suzanne H. Lease[13]

---

* Non-elderly families are those in which the designated family head is under age 65.

Traditional occupational choices

The majority of employed men and women continue to be concentrated in traditional gender-related occupations. The following 2003 statistics illustrate this fact:[14]

- 70 per cent of all employed women were working in one of teaching, nursing and related health occupations, clerical or other administrative positions or sales and service occupations; 31 per cent of employed men worked in these areas.
- 22 per cent of professionals employed in the natural sciences, engineering and mathematics were women.
- 29 per cent of workers in manufacturing were women, with only seven per cent in transportation, trades and construction work.

In 2003, of all Canadians employed in the following professions, women made up these percentages:[15]

- 48 per cent were in business and financial professions
- 52 per cent were doctors and dentists
- 64 per cent were employed in social sciences or religion.

Sales person

"Overall, sales persons was the most common occupation for women in 2001. Secretarial positions were second highest despite the large decrease in the occupation. The most common occupation for men was truck driver. However, if all occupations in information technology (IT) were combined as a group, they outnumber truck drivers as the leading occupation for men."

Statistics Canada[17]

Self-employment

While the number of men and women who report being self-employed has increased, the ratio of two self-employed men for every self-employed woman in Canada in 2004 is similar to that reported in 1995.[16]

Men and non-traditional occupations

Men choosing non-traditional occupations give some of the following reasons for their choice:[18]

- opportunities for less stressful occupations
- increased options for other life choices
- personal fulfillment
- greater economic stability of non-traditional jobs chosen
- increased opportunities for advancement to authority positions (perceived as not available in male-dominated occupations).

In addition, it has been reported that men who choose non-traditional occupations place less value on the achievement of status through a prestigious job than men in traditional occupations and, in general, demonstrate a lower adherence to traditional masculine gender roles.[19]

Self-assessment, occupational choice and cultural influences

"[S]elf-assessments of task competence were found to influence career-relevant decisions…."[20] While the aptitudes of males and females are statistically very similar, males tend to choose occupational areas requiring mathematical competence (engineering, science, math) much more frequently than females. Correll, in examining this tendency, found that "males assess their own mathematical competence higher than their otherwise equal female counterparts. Males are more likely than females with the same math grades and test scores to perceive that they are mathematically competent."[21] An important point made by Correll is that cultural beliefs influence the self-perception of competence in various areas. For example, males were not found to judge themselves as more competent than their otherwise equal female counterparts in verbal tasks.

Gender and goals

An additional gender difference is reflected in the finding that suggests women pursue a greater diversity of goals compared to men. This finding may be related to the change in women's roles that has come about in recent decades. "Women continue to hold goals for marriage and family, yet it is also commonplace for them to pursue goals related to employment or a career, especially in modern Western cultures. In contrast, societal expectations for the male role have changed less dramatically and this may explain, in part, why men remain heavily focused on sex-typed goals related to employment and financial security."[22]

Greene and DeBacker[23] discuss the relative advantages and disadvantages of gender differences in the pursuit of goals. Women who tend to simultaneously pursue multiple goals across a variety of domains may:

- build resilience in the face of blocked or frustrated pursuit of individual goals
- experience more conflict due to the perceived short time frame that they have to achieve numerous major life goals.

Men, pursuing a smaller number of goals clustered within a smaller number of domains, may:

- be more psychologically vulnerable due to the higher risk that some or many important goals may be simultaneously blocked
- experience less conflict related to their perception of a longer time frame for attaining their major life goals.

Gender and life roles

Unpaid work

Unpaid work roles demand time for both men and women, as these 2001 statistics reflect:

- 20 per cent of women and 15 per cent of men reported spending up to nine hours per week taking care of a senior (e.g. parent or relative). Less than four per cent of women and two per cent of men spent more than 10 hours per week caring for a senior. [24]
- About 21 per cent of women spent 30 hours or more per week doing unpaid housework compared with 8 per cent for men. Only 7.5 per cent of women and 13.3 per cent of men reported spending no time on unpaid housework.[25]
- About 16 per cent of women aged 15 and over reported spending 30 hours or more per week looking after children compared with seven per cent of men.[26]

Single parent families

Single parent families became more prevalent through the 1990s. In 2001, 14 per cent of all families were headed by a single parent. While both men and women head single parent households, those headed by women in 2001 outnumbered those headed by men by more than four to one, the same ratio as reported five years earlier in 1996.[27] In 2003, 68 per cent of female lone parents with children under age 16 living at home were employed.[28]

Dual-career families

Dual-career families are the norm in most homes with two parents. With a 2004 employment participation rate of over 80 and 90 per cent for those 25 to 44 years of age, respectively, both women and men are likely to be working.[29] Both husband and wife work in seven out of ten Canadian families.[30] Some additional statistics follow:

- "In nearly half of all Canadian families, a woman's earnings make up 25% to 49% of the family's income. In one out of every four families, a woman's income contributed at least half of the total family income (Vanier Institute, 1997)."[31]
- "Marriage has been shown to have a positive effect on men's earnings, but not on women's."[32]
- "…[W]hen women are the main earners in families and their careers are given priority, the traditional, gendered division of labour at home still largely persists."[33]
- "…[H]aving children depresses women's earnings, but not men's."[34]
- Mothers are less likely than comparable non-mothers to be employed outside the home.[35]
- Employed mothers work fewer hours than employed childless women.[36]
- Employed fathers work more hours than their counterparts who do not have children.[37]
- One in three parents in dual-career families arranged their work schedule to allow sharing of child care with their partner, according to responses in a study by Higgins and Duxbury.[38]
- "…[F]or dual-career couples, men's careers are more frequently given priority when decisions are made that may affect both spouses' careers."[39]

"Using 1977 data, Bielby and Bielby (1992) found that men's careers were typically given priority over their wives'. More than twenty years later, our data indicate that men's careers are still more frequently given priority, even within dual-career couples. This helps men's objective career success, but probably contributes to women's lower earnings. Furthermore, our findings reflect the enduring nature of traditional gender roles, which assign men primary responsibility for being the earner in the family and women responsibility for child care."[40]

Men and the "good provider" role

The good provider role, one that men with families have traditionally assumed, has given meaning and structure to mens' lives for generations.

Providing includes "men's experiences in offering financial and material support to their children and families. Providing is an essential and often taken-for-granted aspect of successful fatherhood."[41]

"Since the 1940's, the provider role has changed dramatically, both in terms of provider role conduct…and provider role culture, or the beliefs and attitudes men hold about being a provider…the good provider role is often central to a man's sense of self and definition of masculinity, even if he himself does not fulfill that role. Although men's family and career choices are diverging, images of the good provider persist."[42]

Levant describes a masculinity crisis that is the "result of the collapse of the pattern by which men have traditionally fulfilled the code for masculine role behaviour—the 'good provider' role. White middle-class men are no longer the good providers for their families that their fathers were and that they expected themselves to be. With the majority of adult women in the work force, very few men are sole providers, and most are co-providers."[43]

However, "most men still cling to the older definitions and emphasize work and individual accomplishment over emotional intimacy and family involvement. As a result, the pressures on men to behave in ways that conflict with various aspects of traditional masculinity…have never been greater."[44]

Given the pressure many men may feel related to the "good provider" role, counsellors will appreciate the distress that such men experience when they are laid off or become unemployed for any reason and how this job loss complicates the balance of relationships in their lives with partners and children.

> *"The contradiction at the heart of fatherhood for successful providers was that providing was no longer equated with success as a parent or partner. Too much commitment to providing could limit and even harm paternal involvement. This realization was unacceptable to some successful providers."*
>
> Kevin M. Roy[45]

Expansionist theory

An alternative theory to that of the "good provider," the expansionist theory attempts to incorporate a more contemporary approach to the conceptions of women, men, work and the family. This theory allows for a more accurate representation of the recent (2002) situation of women and men and their related roles regarding work and family. The expansionist theory is based upon four principles:[46]

- Multiple roles are advantageous to both men and women's physical, mental and relationship health.
- Several aspects contribute to the beneficial effects of multiple roles, including social support and added income.
- Specific conditions predict the positive effects of multiple roles, for example, time restraints and the quality of roles.
- Psychological gender differences tend to be minor.

Women and family roles

"Women identify more with their family roles than do men. Indeed, married women tend to give priority to the family role and 'adjust their work identities to accommodate their family identities, but not vice versa'."[47]

While women tend to identify strongly with their family roles, "over the past 30-plus years, women have increasingly been living with major changes in the construction of their gender role. They have moved from a sole emphasis on the family and now juggle career and family concerns. In making this shift, they have combined traditional values such as love, family, and caring for others with newer values such as independence, career, and defining themselves through their own accomplishments. Many men have yet to make the equivalent changes."[48]

Reflecting the trend of women emphasizing their work roles outside the home is the growth in the employment rate of women with children in the past quarter century:

- "In 2003, 72% of all women with children under age 16 living at home were part of the employed workforce, up from 39% in 1976."[49]
- Contrary to previous patterns of employment for women, when starting a family meant leaving the workforce, in the 1990s, 55 per cent of women returned to work within two years of giving birth.[50]

Women are still frequently required to perform in an array of life roles such as:

- spouse, daughter, friend
- mother
- home manager
- community, school and church volunteer.

Many women feel pressured to live up to an external ideal of how these roles should be carried out. Melnyk, Fox and Stewart note that for "women entering or re-entering the workforce, the new role of 'working woman' is simply added to all of their other roles without any of these others being taken away or reduced in scope. This situation can often lead to role overload and burnout."[51]

Women and men: Equal dependent care

Contrary to much of the literature that reflects women continuing to shoulder the bulk of family demands, Higgins and Duxbury found, in fact, that "the role of 'caregiver' is not as strongly associated with gender as it was in the past. Traditionally, research in this area has determined that women spend more time in child care than men. Such was not the case in this study, as mothers and fathers who engaged in child care spent essentially the same amount of time each week in child care-related activities (the typical mother in the sample spent approximately 11.1 hours per week in child care while the typical father spent approximately 10.5 hours). Similarly, the men and the women in the sample with elder care responsibilities spent approximately the same amount of time per week in elder care activities (the typical man with elder care responsibilities spent 4.6 hours per week in their care while the typical woman spent approximately 5.2 hours)." [52]

Men and women: Unequal home chores

"It should also be noted that this 'enlightened' attitude with respect to the distribution of 'family labour' does not extend to home chores. The women in the sample spent substantially more time in home chores per week than the men, regardless of sector, job type or dependent care status."[53]

"Finally, it is [also] interesting to note that the women in managerial and professional positions in our sample spend more time in child care per week (11.5 hours) than women in other types of jobs, or their male counterparts in managerial and professional positions…These data would suggest that many professional women in Canada have bought into the concept of 'super mom' and place very high demands on themselves with respect to both work and family."[54]

Gender and burnout

"Burnout…is a state of emotional, physical and mental exhaustion which is often found in those who are involved with people in emotionally demanding situations. Chronic daily stresses rather than unique critical life events are regarded as central factors in producing burnout. At severe levels, burnout overlaps with symptoms of depression."[55]

It appears that burnout is related to gender and the extent to which people are responsible for care of dependents, including children and seniors. For women, it is also related to job type. For men, on the other hand, burnout does not appear related to job type. When job type and care of dependents are controlled, women report higher levels of burnout than men:[56]

- 37 per cent of women in management and professional positions compared with 29 per cent of men in these positions
- 36 per cent of women with dependent care responsibilities compared with 30 per cent of men with dependent care responsibilities
- 32 per cent of women without dependent care responsibilities compared with 26 per cent of men without dependent care responsibilities.

Gender and the tendency to seek counselling assistance

"[G]ender and ethnicity may affect the level of help-seeking behaviour that is exhibited. Specifically, help-seeking behaviour tends to be more common among women than among men and more common among Caucasians than among other racial groups."[57] For example, Murray states that services of career centres in American universities "are extraordinarily underused by men."[58]

Men tend to be reluctant to visit counsellors. One indication of perceived manliness includes the belief that men should be able to solve their own problems. Having been taught from an early age that "big boys don't cry," they have difficulty discussing their concerns and are less likely than women to seek counselling.[59]

Additional characteristics related to women

Women and educational attainment

The average educational attainment of women and men in the general population aged 15 and over tends to be quite comparable. In 2005, however, it was reported that women made up "nearly 60 per cent of university graduates…they'll soon outnumber men in medicine and law."[60] The following information reflects women as a percentage of total full-time university enrolment, by level, in 2000– 2001:[61]

- Bachelor's and first professional degree: 57.4 per cent
- Master's: 51.8 per cent
- Doctorate: 45.5 per cent.

Abuse issues

Thirty per cent of women are abused, either physically or verbally, at some point in their lives. Abuse of women cuts across all classes and cultures. The rates of spousal homicide in Alberta are the highest in Canada.[62]

In 2002, figures from reporting police departments in Canada reflected that:[63]

- 27 per cent of all victims of violent crimes were victims of family violence
- 62 per cent of all family violence victims were victims of spousal violence
- 85 per cent of all victims of spousal violence were females compared with 15 per cent of male victims.

Family violence has a tremendous impact on all aspects of the abused persons' lives, including their workplace. The perpetrator may call the abused woman at work or even come to the worksite. In some cases, employers ask women affected by an abusive situation to leave their employment, fearing for the safety of their employees, clients and themselves. In such circumstances, women who change jobs and move, experience issues related to finding new:

- child care
- housing
- transportation.[64]

> *"What amazes me are the systemic barriers that women face when they try to leave an abusive situation. She is at risk, her children are at risk, yet there is very little monetary support available. She may not be able to access any financial resources and may have very few other resources to draw on."*
>
> Jan Reimer
>
> Alberta Council of Women's Shelters

The challenge of child care

Child care continues to be an issue for all working parents and seems widely accepted as particularly a women's issue. When appropriate quality child care is not available, problems may surface at work, such as:[65]

- arriving later, leaving earlier than other workers
- scheduling difficulties
- missing work
- concentration problems
- turning down a promotion that might interfere with child care.

The lower a woman's income, the fewer her resources and the more her problems associated with child care are exacerbated. For single mothers, the effects of these issues are compounded.

Employer perceptions: Women and absenteeism

There appears to be conflicting information regarding absenteeism as related to gender. Since women are most often responsible for the family child care arrangements, a common fear of employers is that women may use their own sick leave to care for their sick children.

The booklet *Barriers to Women's Advancement* cites studies that find patterns of sick leave are similar for men and women in the same occupations. In other words, in routine jobs, sick leave is higher for both men and women, whereas in more challenging jobs, the leave is still comparable, though considerably less. The conclusion is that patterns of leave are tied more closely to the type of job than to the gender of the worker.[66]

Discrimination and sexism

Discrimination and sexism affect women in the workplace in a number of ways. Such views are often expressed attitudinally, as discussed below.

"Certain jobs are more appropriate for men than for women, and vice versa."

In 2003, 70 per cent of all women in the workforce were found in teaching, nursing and related health occupations, clerical or other administrative positions, or sales and service occupations—traditionally female-dominated fields of work.[67] This fact continues to reinforce beliefs that some employers and workers still hold regarding the suitability of certain jobs for women and men.

"Women don't want responsibility or promotion."

Individually, it is to be expected that women as well as men differ in their desire to pursue higher levels of responsibility within organizations. As a group, however, there is no doubt that women are less likely than men to gain high levels of responsibility. "[A]ll else being equal, women are less likely to be promoted than men."[68] The glass ceiling appears to be firmly in place in 2005, with women holding only 14.4 per cent of corporate officer positions in the top 500 companies in Canada, a figure similar to that of 2002.[69]

"Women are more emotional than men, and this causes problems in the workplace."

Emotions are viewed subjectively, and how they are expressed may largely be a matter of kind rather than degree. For example, a man's anger may be seen as authoritative while a woman's crying may be viewed as a weakness. Yet both persons, in this case, could be reacting to the same situation.[70]

Responding to Challenges: Strategies and Practices

Both women and men face a variety of challenges as they develop career-building strategies to address their current goals and to move towards their preferred futures. Whether counsellors are working with men or women, an important aspect of the assistance they offer should be an accepting, flexible and bias-free approach. Some strategies discussed in this section, such as bias-conscious counselling, will apply to both women and men, while others will have particular application to one gender or the other.

Bias-conscious counselling

Bias-conscious counselling is defined as the interactive enabling process between professional helper and client where counsellors are highly aware of their own values, especially as they relate to expectations for women and men. Gender roles that differ from the social norm are viewed by the counsellor as an appropriate expression of the client's individuality.[71]

While the following guidelines for bias-conscious counselling were created focusing on work with women, for the most part they apply equally well to working with men and, for that matter, clients, in general. They have been adapted as follows:[72]

Be aware

- Be aware of your own values, especially as they relate to gender-role expectations.
- Assess and monitor your own activities for gender-fair practices.
- Recognize that you are subject to the same biases as the rest of the culture. Take part in professional development programs and training to maintain and increase your awareness in this area.

- Continue to increase your understanding of the social, biological and psychological development of women and men.
- Stay informed about special issues that have an impact on both women's and men's career development, for example, day care, family violence, training in non-traditional roles.

Be sensitive to your relationship with clients

- Wherever possible, allow clients to choose the counsellor with whom they wish to work.
- Recognize that there are circumstances in which clients may prefer a counsellor of the same or opposite gender.
- Whenever possible, ensure that the personal power between you and clients approaches equality.
- Negotiate counselling objectives together.
- Encourage clients to be autonomous.

Use gender-fair theory, language and materials

- Be aware of the assumptions that underlie the theoretical approaches to counselling and recognize how these theories may apply differently to women and men.
- Use gender-fair language (further information included in this section) in your written and oral communication.
- Be aware that studies clearly show that people equate gender-neutral male terms with males, even when they're intended generically (e.g. fireman, journeyman).
- Ensure that the materials you use in counselling are gender-fair.
- Avoid using test instruments that contain gender biases.

Be sensitive to stereotyping and discrimination

- Recognize the impact of stereotyping, discrimination and prejudice on the basis of gender, as well as race, age, disability, ethnicity, sexual orientation and religion. Work to counteract the negative effects of these attitudes on clients.
- Recognize that clients' difficulties may rest in situations or cultural factors which limit their self-concepts, aspirations and understanding of choices available. Help clients realize that choices are best made on the basis of what works best for them, not on the basis of "shoulds" or "should nots."

Offer choice

- Both women and men have legal rights to participate fully in the workforce. Offer clients the same range of skills training, upgrading and/or occupational choices regardless of gender.
- Don't make assumptions about what particular clients might or might not be interested in because of their gender—or because of other life roles they fill (e.g. parent, partner, grandparent, etc.).
- Acknowledge non-traditional occupational choices and support clients in seeking postings they're qualified for and training they're interested in.

Offer support

- Recognize that encouraging clients to develop on their own may not be enough. Help them find personal support. Help clients analyse emotional and social barriers between them and their goals.
- Stay current and connected with support services in your area that are available for clients (for example, child care, legal aid, health care, transportation, emergency services). Help clients gain access to the services they need.
- If you see a gap in the services available to women and/or men in your community, initiate or act as a catalyst for the development of the needed services.

Use gender-fair language[73]

Use inclusive words and terms:

- man, men » person, people, humans
- salesman » sales representative, sales person
- the best man for the job » the best person for the job
- manning the booth » staffing the booth
- housewife » homemaker, home manager
- foreman » supervisor
- business man » business person

Avoid trivializing language:

- girl (referring to an adult) » woman
- the girls in the office » the women in the office
- the boys in the office» the men in the office

Avoid irrelevant distinctions, differential treatment or phrases that imply exceptions to the rule:

- Miss, Mrs. » Ms. (In many contexts a woman's marital status is no more relevant than a man's. Some women still prefer Miss or Mrs.; when in doubt, ask.)
- woman attorney » attorney
- lady construction worker » construction worker
- male nurse » nurse

Don't assume that all readers, listeners or form responders are male:

- Dear Sir (name unknown) » Dear Madam or Sir
- Dear Editor, Credit Manager, Friends, etc.
- You and your wife » You and your partner

Helping clients explore values and beliefs

Gender may influence the values and beliefs that people learn and continue to hold. Counsellors have an important role to play in facilitating client exploration and awareness of their values and beliefs. A variety of strategies might be implemented with clients to facilitate this process. Some examples follow:[74]

- guided self-exploration regarding what is important in their work (and non-work) roles
- lifelines, life stories, future autobiographies, guided fantasies to anticipate and contrast possible futures
- narratives to explore embedded meanings
- open questions to prompt the prioritization of values.

"As clients identify and prioritize their values, they may also realize that they hold conflicting values. Individuals may assign equal priority to the roles of work and family, potentially contributing to work-family conflicts."[75]

"Counsellors can assist clients in reconciling conflicting values or identify[ing] strategies that reduce the potential conflict in their careers. Reconciliation of conflicting values may involve planning to meet these values sequentially… Strategies that reduce potential role conflicts include the choice of work settings that accommodate both work and the family through flexible work hours or on-site day-care facilities. It may also be helpful to have clients explore how values can be satisfied in designing a satisfactory lifestyle, not just in the work role."[76]

Facilitation of the exploration of values is equally important with male and female clients. Male clients with families, for example, may experience life-work conflict related to their conflicting beliefs regarding the traditional role as provider versus the more contemporary role as hands-on family person. Women may experience similar conflict regarding their life and work, with beliefs regarding responsibility for family conflicting with the demands of their work. Such exploration may help clients make choices that reduce work-life conflict.

Building skills and support through mentors

Mentoring relationships is a valuable approach for both women and men that allows them to initiate and control their own learning and skill building.

Mentoring relationships

"Mentoring is a powerful and popular way for people to learn a variety of personal and professional skills. In fact, mentoring is one of the oldest forms of influence…most adults can identify a person who, at some time in their life, had a significant and positive impact on them. Mentors can be friends, relatives, co-workers, teachers, as well as historic or contemporary personalities. Most often, a mentor is a more experienced or older person who acts as a role model, compatriot, challenger, guide or cheerleader."[77]

Some common examples of mentoring relationships follow:[78]

- "Women executives assist other women to break the 'glass ceiling.'
- Senior citizens demonstrate hobbies to elementary students.
- Business managers take new employees 'under their wings.'
- Volunteers partner with students at risk of dropping out of school.
- People managing life challenges provide support and wisdom to others.
- Older students help younger students cope with peer pressure.

- University alumni provide guidance to students seeking business careers.
- Experienced faculty members assist their newer colleagues.
- Successful business people help new entrepreneurs starting out."

Finding a mentor

Clients may benefit from establishing mentoring relationships with experienced individuals that they can learn from. Counsellors can encourage clients to identify the type of assistance they might need or areas they would value learning more about and to locate an appropriate mentor. Peer Resources, a Canadian organization that has recognized expertise in mentoring, coaching and peer helping, offers tips on finding a mentor. Some examples of their tips follow:[79]

- "Check with local businesses or organizations to determine whether they have a formal mentor program you can access" or "if they can provide you the names of any retired executives who might be willing to act as volunteer mentors."
- "Ask your local Chamber of Commerce whether they have created a mentor program or service."
- "Visit a retirement or senior citizen's centre and let them know you are looking for a mentor."
- "If you are enrolled in a college or university, make an appointment with their student career services to find out if they have a list of volunteer mentors."
- "Connect with exhibit areas of conferences and conventions associated with your field; these are often free admission events staffed by experienced persons who could be potential mentors."
- "Use your network of friends and relatives to let them know what kind of person you want as a mentor. Ask them to keep alert to someone who could help you."

Tips for learning through mentors

Once a mentor relationship has been established, it is important to maximize the learning experiences available. The following tips may be helpful for clients:

- "Prior to your first meeting with your mentor, write down at least three things you would like to achieve through mentoring. Rank the three items in order of importance to you. Also write down three things that concern you most about meeting with your mentor. Rank these three things in order of importance.
- If not included in either of the lists created above, write down at least three attitudes or perspectives you will be able to provide during the mentoring sessions. If possible, write down three things about yourself that might get in the way of you being able to make the most of the mentoring opportunity.
- If not included in your lists, write down at least three things you would like your mentor to provide.
- Prepare a brief autobiography based on the above lists that you can share with your mentor when you first meet. Be sure to also include your own vision, mission or life goals.
- It is likely that you selected your mentor or were matched with your mentor because of the mentor's resources. This typically means that your mentor has both considerable gifts and a tight time schedule. Dealing with time is a key aspect of the success of mentoring. Make sure you are clear about your needs."[80]
- "The focus of most successful mentoring is mutual learning. Feel free to explore what you have to offer the mentor. A sense of humour and a sense of enjoyment of your time together are essential as well. If your needs are not being met, discuss this with your mentor. Terminating a mentoring relationship or switching to a different mentor are not signs of failure. Recognizing your changing needs and finding a respectful way to meet your learning goals are one of the keys to successful executive mentoring."[81]

Regarding women

Counselling strategies for late entry or re-entry women

Herr and Cramer[82] note that the approach for women clients who are either re-entry or late entry to the workforce depends on how long they have been out of the workforce or the length of time between termination of formal education and entry into the workforce. Their suggestions, which continue to be of value, are as follows:

- Reinforce clients' positive feelings about self-worth and ability to make contributions in the paid workforce.

- Provide information that they lack about effective career decision making.
- Help clients explore changes in lifestyle that might be necessary to accommodate their plans.
- Help clients prepare to deal with both covert and overt discrimination based on gender and age.
- Provide specialized experiences as necessary in assertiveness training…(and self-awareness training).
- Help clients weigh the pros and cons of entry-level positions against training or upgrading.
- Help clients with work search skills.
- Be aware that widowed or divorced re-entry women may be dealing with issues of loss.

Some additional suggestions that continue to be helpful in working with women re-entering the workforce follow. Encourage such clients to:[83]

- become aware of available funding
- identify transferable skills, for example, those related to homemaking and volunteer experiences
- volunteer in areas of interest
- engage in job shadowing
- seek out equity employers
- become aware of entrepreneurial opportunities, including home-based businesses
- identify, build and maintain support systems, as appropriate
- identify and join self-help groups, as appropriate.

Helping women empower themselves

According to Melnyk, Fox and Stewart,[84] counselling women in their career search includes helping them to empower themselves, take control of their lives, set their own goals and make decisions that reflect their needs. This well-tested approach continues to be valid and valuable. Women who become empowered will be:

- able to communicate their needs more effectively
- able to negotiate with others to meet these needs
- more likely to overcome barriers
- willing to explore strategies for resolving problems.

The process of helping clients empower themselves includes helping them:[85]

- enhance self-esteem
- identify and acknowledge skills
- review past accomplishments
- reprogram negative self-talk with positive self-talk
- clarify values and priorities
- identify resources and sources of support
- learn more about decision making, goal setting and problem solving
- become an assertive communicator
- generate options
- obtain current information.

Melnyk, Fox and Stewart identify the following techniques as particularly beneficial in empowering women:[86]

- building decision-making/goal-setting skills
- building self-presentation skills
- building assertive communication skills.

Tips for working with women who are abused

- "Believe her. Women are often not believed. Support her, don't judge.
- Her safety and her children's safety are always the most important issues.
- Be aware of resources and help women to become aware of and access them.
- Give her permission to talk about it through your accepting, non-judgmental attitude.
- Include reference to family violence in any stress management courses or discussions."

Jan Reimer
Alberta Council of Women's Shelters

Group support for women

As Stechynsky and Harper[87] observe, women "are very adept at supporting each other and often find a great deal of comfort with other women." Women often benefit from group experiences:

- They value a nurturing and supportive atmosphere in which to share their own stories and talk about themselves as a means of self-discovery and of building self-esteem.
- Women's groups can become the basis of a personal and professional network and a source of valuable support and information.
- Clients can access job search clubs or career development groups for women or, if such groups don't exist in their area, consider setting one up.

Focusing on Employment

Workplace challenges

The gendered workplace

Ordinary workplace practices and procedures and everyday communication and relationships between individuals in the workplace tend to reinforce traditional gender divisions. This unconscious reinforcement of traditional gender divisions continues to support the gendered workplace (an environment where traditional gender roles are upheld and the expectations of workers are rooted in assumptions that workers possess masculine qualities). Some of the spinoffs of the gendered workplace that have been discussed previously in this chapter include:[88]

- gender wage gap (males earn higher average salaries than females)
- pooling of women in the lower ranks of the workforce
- glass ceiling (women less likely to be promoted to upper management positions).

Increasing demands of the workplace

The demands of work have increased over the past decade. In 1991, one in 10 respondents in a survey reported working 50 hours or more per week, whereas in 2001, one in four reported doing so. "It has become more difficult for Canadian employees… to meet work expectations during regular hours."[89]

> *"Traditionally a women's issue, gender equality is gaining currency as both a men's issue and a business issue, as work-life integration becomes increasingly important to both the people within the institution and the institution itself. Its attainment will be made possible by re-thinking, re-conceptualizing and re-inventing organizations in line with gender equity."*[90]
>
> Aruna Rao, Rieky Stuart and David Kellehar as cited in Payne (2002)

Balancing work and life roles

Counsellors can help both male and female clients investigate potential work opportunities to help them achieve work that is not only satisfying but also supports the rest of their life roles. This may be especially important to individuals with dependent care responsibilities who are most likely to experience work-life conflict.[91] Some related considerations for clients investigating potential work opportunities, beyond the nature of the work itself, include gathering information regarding:

- work environment: relationships between employees and management, styles of communication
- overtime work: advance notice, ability to refuse
- child care: existence of on site or nearby
- work arrangements: flexible arrival and departure times, telework.

Equal pay for similar work

Men have traditionally received higher average earnings than women. "Even when women do 'all the right stuff' (e.g. getting a similar education as men, maintaining similar levels of family power, working in similar industries, not moving in and out of the workforce, not removing their names from consideration for a transfer more often), they still lag behind men in salary progression."[92]

The following statistics reflect earnings by occupation in Canada in 2001. The percentage in brackets indicates women's earnings as a percentage of those of men:[93]

- managerial—women: $46,294, men: $66,382 (69.7 per cent)
- administrative—women: $34,048, men: $54,368 (62.6 per cent)
- natural sciences—women: $48,482, men: 59,692 (81.2 per cent)
- sales and service—women: $24,140, men: $38,160 (62.3 per cent)

"Alberta's *Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act* requires that employers not discriminate on the basis of gender. The *Act* specifically ensures that men and women working in the same establishment and performing 'similar or substantially similar work' must be paid at the same rate. Any pay differentials must be based on factors other than gender."[94]

Counsellors may be faced with the issue of equal pay for similar work and can best help clients by being as informed as possible about the issue. Knowledge of community resources that may be of assistance to clients will also be important.

Part-time work

Some clients, both women and men, may prefer part-time work. On the other hand, many clients may be working part-time even though their preference is full-time. The following Canadian statistics for 2003 provide more insight into the part-time/full-time issue:[95]

- About 20 per cent of female part-time employees worked part-time due to personal or family responsibilities.
    - 13 per cent claimed child care responsibilities.
    - Six per cent claimed other family or personal responsibilities.
- Two per cent of male part-time employees cited personal or family responsibilities as their reason for working part-time.
- 27 per cent of female part-time employees reported a preference for full-time work but could only find part-time work.
- 30 per cent of male part-time employees preferred full-time work.

Part-time work may be less attractive to clients for the following reasons:[96]

- lower wages than full-time jobs
- lack of benefits such as paid holidays, pensions, job security
- little or no union protection, training or promotion.

Counsellors may have clients with part-time employment who prefer to work full-time if they can find such employment. Some strategies for counsellors might include helping clients:

- explore the option of combining two or more part-time jobs
- become aware of funding and/or training opportunities that may enhance their skills and make them more competitive for full-time work.
- become aware of entrepreneurial opportunities, including home-based businesses, to supplement their part-time work.
- identify options for expanding their part-time work; create and present related proposals regarding such options to their employers.

Women in trades

What do I wish I would have known when I started working with women who wanted to enter the trades?

"I wish I would have known just how difficult it was going to be. There are still many barriers for women trying to enter this working environment. Industry is working hard to change this but it will be a while yet before the construction workplace culture is good for women."

JudyLynn Archer

Women Building Futures

"There has been considerable promotion of the trades as a viable employment alternative for both women and men. However, one of the major hurdles that both men and women experience is that the industry is not really interested in hiring starters. It is the journeyman they want. This presents a challenge to women (and men) trying to enter the industry."[97]

Tips for counsellors[98]

The following tips will assist counsellors helping women interested in entering the trades:

- Understand the industry in order to help clients understand the industry.
  - The trades are physically challenging and can be a rough environment.
  - There is a lot of opportunity in the trades.
  - Apprenticeship is a hierarchical system, with the journeymen supervising the work and training of the apprentices.
  - The trades are a traditional, male-dominated environment with related communication styles, for example, blunt, no chit-chat, no sign of weakness shown.
  - Women are still significantly under-represented in the trades. The rate of retention for women in trades is low.
  - Women most frequently leave the trades due to the work environment.
  - For women who stay, work in the trades instills a sense of pride and confidence.

- Do the research as you hope clients will.
  - Read about the trades. Check industry newsletters—most trades have them.
  - More importantly, connect with workers in the industry.
  - Go on site, check out the environment and talk directly with workers, managers, etc.

- Help women prepare for entry into the trades.
  - Provide a referral to a credible trades preparation course.
  - Ensure that safety is thoroughly covered in the course, including St. John's first aid, CPR, Construction Safety Training Practice (CSTP), Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS), fall protection/fall arrest, safe forklift operation among others.

- Be aware that safety training is critical and very costly to provide. Employers are more likely to hire candidates who have completed safety training.
- Encourage clients to ensure they have a solid background in mathematics and science. Both are very important in the trades. Encourage clients to seek tutoring assistance, if necessary.
- Point clients to online resources to research information on the various trades.
- Help clients look at the positive and to balance that with the reality of working in the trades.
  - The trades are not for everyone. No matter how strong the woman, successful entry into the trades is not always possible.
  - Women must be "better than" to succeed in trades. Totally reliable child care is critical. Employers are typically not supportive of women missing work due to child-care issues. It is especially important that women entering trades:
    - Be on time.
    - Do not miss work for any reason.
    - If the employer needs you to stay late, stay late.
- A strong support system is critical.
- Avoid setting women up. Ensure they are aware of what they are facing and are prepared to handle it.
- Help clients explore alternatives if work in the trades is not realistic for them at that particular time of their lives.
- Encourage clients to find a mentor in their trade. Woman-to-woman mentoring is particularly helpful.

Sexual harassment

Sexual harassment involves unwanted or unwelcome behaviour that is sexual in nature and has a negative effect on the victim's job. Sexual harassment is illegal. Although the majority of victims are women, women can harass men and same-gender harassment also occurs. [99]

"Sexual harassment may include:

- unwelcome staring, comments or teasing
- questions or discussions about sexual activities
- offensive humour or language related to gender
- displaying or showing suggestive material
- unwanted sexual requests or demands

- unwanted physical contact or closeness such as patting, pinching or rubbing, leaning over or standing too close
- physical assault."[100]

If the victim reports the situation or does not "play along", the harasser may try to get even in a variety of ways including threatening or actually following through with:[101]

- giving more work than can be handled
- lowering wages or reducing hours of work
- refusing to grant raises or promotions
- firing the victim.

In all cases, it will be important to help clients anticipate the consequences of any actions they may choose to take and to identify and plan their responses, as much as possible. Counsellors might help clients brainstorm their own approaches and/or to weigh some or all of the following options:[102]

- document experiences of harassment—include specifics (e.g. date, time, description)
- tell the harasser to stop—in person or in writing
- use the formal complaint process at their place of employment
- enlist the help of a same-sex manager
- keep copies of your performance evaluation as proof you are doing your job well
- report harassment to the police if safety is at risk.

In Conclusion

Gender issues in the workplace will continue to present both clients and counsellors with challenges. Women's issues continue to be acknowledged and will continue to be a focus for career counsellors. Emerging issues for men related to changing roles provide an additional focus and new challenge for counsellors.

Websites and Resource Organizations

Alberta Council of Women's Shelters. Retrieved June 6, 2005, from **www.acws.ca**

- has information about family violence and related programs
- includes a clickable map of shelters in Alberta

Alberta Human Resources and Employment. Retrieved April 13, 2005, from **www.gov.ab.ca/hre/lfstats**

- provides Alberta labour force statistics
- links to labour market information and labour market reviews

Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission. Publications and resources: *Equal pay for similar work.* Retrieved June 5, 2005, from **www.albertahumanrights.ab.ca/publications/Information_Sheets/Text/Info_Equal_Pay.asp**

- an information sheet on Alberta's *Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act*

Canada Business. Government services for entrepreneurs. Retrieved June 20, 2005, from **www.canadabusiness.gc.ca**

- provides complete information and resources for entrepreneurs

Centre for Families, Work & Well-being. University of Guelph. Retrieved June 10, 2005, from **www.worklifecanada.ca**

- an interdisciplinary research and educational centre with information about changes in family patterns, paid work and broader economic and political structures

Exploring Self-Employment. Retrieved June 9, 2005, from **www.exploreselfemploy.ca**

- a self-assessment tool for those thinking of starting their own business

National Clearinghouse on Family Violence. Public Health Agency of Canada. Retrieved June 7, 2005, from **www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ncfv-cnivf/familyviolence**

- Canada's national information resource centre about family violence
- collects, develops and disseminates information on prevention, protection and treatment

Peer Resources. Retrieved May 31, 2005, from **www.peer.ca**

- has information about peer programs, mentoring and coaching, including articles, training programs, certified trainers and links to related information

Society for Canadian Women in Science and Technology. Retrieved June 8, 2005, from **www.harbour.sfu.ca/scwist/projects.html**

- a non-profit voluntary association with a mission to promote and empower women in science and technology and help young women explore work in these fields
- provides information on career events, workshops and conferences

Statistics Canada. Retrieved May 13, 2005, from **www.statcan.ca**

- Canada's central statistical agency, with information on population and other aspects of life in Canada

Status of Women Canada. Retrieved June 8, 2005, from **www.swc-cfc.gc.ca**

- Has information about and tools to promote gender equality

Trade Secrets. Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training. Retrieved August 10, 2005, from **www.tradesecrets.org**

- Provides information about apprenticeship and industry training in Alberta, including requirements for entry, listing of trades and occupations, financial assistance information, scholarships and awards, links to related resources and information and more

Wired Woman. Retrieved June 8, 2005, from **www.wiredwoman.com**

- an organization that provides networking, education and mentorship for women in technology

Women Building Futures. Retrieved June 6, 2005, from **www.womenbuildingfutures.com**

- a registered, not-for-profit, charitable organization that helps women build better lives and achieve economic prosperity through training and mentorship
- has information on Alberta-based training programs for women entering the trades, including hands-on skills training to prepare women for entry-level apprenticeship positions in Alberta's construction and mechanical trades
- provides information for potential employers and job postings for trades positions

Women in Technology International. Retrieved June 8, 2005, from **www.witi.com**

- promotes empowerment of women to achieve success through technology, leadership and economic prosperity

Women's Web. Retrieved June 9, 2005, from **www.womensweb.ca**

- an on-line community for women that includes career development information and tips

Women's Work. Retrieved June 9, 2005, from
www.wwork.com

- a website for women with home-based businesses
- includes weekly features, articles and more

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CHAPTER 4

Immigrants and Visible Minorities

Immigrants and
Visible Minorities

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Career–building Strategies for People From Diverse Groups

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Immigrants and Visible Minorities

What do I wish I had known when I first started working with immigrants and refugees?

"I wish I had been more aware of the barriers and challenges they face. I am still dismayed at how little recognition of their education and experience they receive when they come to Canada."

Karen Berg
Mennonite Centre for Newcomers

"I didn't know about the variety of barriers, including systemic ones. It seems we tend to undervalue their education and experience even though we don't have a good understanding of it."

Don Baergen
Mennonite Centre for Newcomers

Introduction

Statistics

A total of 235,808 people immigrated to Canada in 2004.[1] This number reflects the highest level since the 1920s and 1930s when large numbers of immigrants came to western Canada to find work and to build the railroad.[2] Except for that period in history, "Canada's annual intake of immigrants has rarely been higher than 1 per cent of its total population."[3]

The number of immigrants who came to Alberta in 2005 was 19,333 or just over 7.4 per cent of all immigrants to Canada.[4] The majority of immigrants who came to Alberta in 2005 were from three major source countries: People's Republic of China (16.1 per cent), Philippines (12.6 per cent) and India (11.1 per cent).[5]

In 2001, 13.4 per cent or almost four million Canadians identified themselves as visible minorities. This proportion has increased steadily since 1981 when 4.7 per cent of the population identified themselves as visible minorities.[6] *The Employment Equity Act* defines visible minorities as "persons, other than aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour."[7] Immigrants are not necessarily visible minorities, nor are visible minorities necessarily immigrants.

Ethnic origin refers to the ethnic orgins of an individual's ancestors, defined as the cultural roots that go back before grandparents. In 2001, there were more than 200 ethnic groups in Canada.[8]

As minority populations enter the workforce in greater numbers, counsellors must become increasingly familiar with how cultural diversity affects career development throughout the career cycle, as well as its effects on the counselling process from assessment to intervention.[9] Added to the usual complexities of working with a client is the need to develop an understanding of and sensitivity to many aspects of another culture.

Characteristics of Immigrant and Visible Minority Clients

Counsellors working to help immigrant and visible minority clients may be prone to difficulties if they inadequately understand the basis of clients' beliefs and values.[10]

"It is important to understand the situation where newcomers are coming from—are they independent immigrants or refugees? Some may have been in camps for years living through horrific circumstances. It's important to consider how we can best work with people who are trying to adjust to our society, and our workplaces."

Karol Adamowicz
Mennonite Centre for Newcomers

Recent immigrants to Canada are adapting to life in a new environment as well as having to adjust their career goals and plans to unfamiliar cultural, economic and political situations. This section explores several aspects of this adaptation and adjustment that have implications for the counselling process.

Descriptions of immigrants and refugees

Citizenship and Immigration Canada defines categories of immigration as follows:[11]

- **Refugees** are persons who require protection or relief, who most often have fled their countries involuntarily, and who have little if any time to prepare for moving to Canada. Refugees may arrive directly in Canada, but time in temporary camps is common.
- **Family class immigrants** are close relatives who join family members already established in Canada. The relative who is the original immigrant is financially responsible for family class immigrants.
- **Economic category or independent immigrants** demonstrate their capacity for financial independence through skilled work, entrepreneurship, investments or self-employment.
- **Live-in care workers** are temporary workers brought to Canada to meet short-term employment needs such as child care or elder care. Caregivers can apply for permanent status after two years of employment.

In general, immigrants to Canada:

- choose to leave their birth country[12]
- have consciously chosen Canada as their destination[13]
- are given immigrant status upon arrival, meaning they can apply for citizenship in three years[14]
- may be rejoining family members already in Canada who may be legally responsible for them for a certain number of years[15]
- have time to prepare for their departure, bringing relevant documents[16]
- have high levels of health, education and self-sufficiency[17]
- may have been chosen on a points system, where points are given for educational level, training, work experience and knowledge of French or English.[18]

In comparison, refugees in Canada:

- have fled their homeland for humanitarian or political reasons [19]
- have not necessarily made a conscious choice to come to Canada[20]
- are in Canada as "refugee claimants or on employment or student authorizations or Minister's permits"[21]
- may have left quickly, leaving behind papers, credentials and other documents[22]
- may have spent months or years in refugee or detention camps[23]
- may have left family behind and often arrive in Canada traumatized[24]
- tend to have lower levels of education and depend upon the Canadian social system.[25]

Although these comparisons are generalized, it is important to note that both categories of newcomers to Canada experience adjustment issues.[26]

> *"It's important to know about the various referral agencies that are available to give people further assistance. Many times there is emotional trauma. We need to be aware of what our clients can do to deal with torture, abuse or other problems so that they can move forward and get into the labour market."*
>
> Dick Bellamy
> Alberta Human Resources and Employment

Understanding cultural transition

The various dimensions of culture may include "age, gender, ability, race, religion, language, family values, socioeconomic status and sexual orientation…"[27] Culture is considered to be "all those things people have learned to do, believe, value and enjoy. It is the totality of ideals, beliefs, skills, tools, customs and institutions into which each member of a society is born."[28]

When people are immersed in a culture not their own, they experience an adjustment process. Sometimes, if this adjustment is severe, it is called culture shock. There are thought to be three reasons why culture shock occurs:[29]

- Newcomers no longer get the usual response to their behaviours.
- Newcomers begin to realize they no longer know the cultural rules of the game.
- Newcomers no longer receive credit for their skills, ideas and accomplishments.

Culture shock does not necessarily occur when people first arrive in a new and different country. Practitioners note that it may take some time before newcomers are confronted with the deeper meanings and expectations that are so difficult to understand. It helps when working with newcomers to remember that people have different ways of perceiving everything, from the nuances of language and gestures to different ideas about working.[30]

> *"Sometimes people arrive with false or unrealistic expectations of what they are going to be able to do. This can be a huge issue with teens and young adults. We try to help them to look realistically at where they're at, help them adjust and be able to take positive steps forward."*
>
> Frank Bessai
>
> Catholic Social Services

Culture shock may negatively affect an individual's ability to effectively gather information, make decisions and solve problems.

- Adjustment difficulties cluster around:[31]
  - security, comfort and support
  - self-worth and self-acceptance
  - competence and autonomy
  - identity and belonging
  - love, fulfillment and meaning.

- Inner conflicts and emotional turmoil associated with culture shock and homesickness can scatter energy, reduce motivation and limit risk-taking behaviours and openness to learning.
- Individuals may be grieving over the loss of their previous sources of support and validation.
- Family dynamics may be disturbed, which may directly and indirectly affect a worker's employment behaviour and mental health. Some people have family and psychological issues that require additional, specialized intervention.[32]

During cultural adjustment the "main factor that emerges in understanding the emotional reaction of immigrants looking for work is that it brings them face to face with harsh economic realities."[33] Immigrants and refugees usually arrive with high expectations about Canada's economic and employment situation. Canada is seen as "a land of opportunity and hope. But then reality strikes and newcomers understand the severity of barriers facing them. They can become depressed very quickly. Canada may be a plentiful place, but it could take from two to fifteen years for newcomers to adjust."[34]

Loss of or threats to identity

The threats to self-identity and the identity conflicts experienced by immigrants generally fall into these categories:[35]

Role identity and role shock

In many cultures, a major portion of identity is derived from work. Validation and meaning may depend on work role performance and role-based relationships. Role shock is a term used to describe the experiences of an individual moving from a more traditional or high context culture to one that has more loosely structured roles. "…[I]t is very misleading for new immigrants to assume that they can behave in their usual role in the new culture and expect to have the same kind of satisfaction, social response and reward that they used to enjoy. Barriers to meaningful communication and career exploration can thus be created by ethnic persons' habituated role behaviours and expectations, which may elicit undesirable reactions…"[36]

Occupational identity

Loss of a previous occupational identity that used to act as "an anchor for self-esteem" may result in frustration, hopelessness and bitterness. Practitioners describe the loss of identity that occurs when people had occupational competence in their country but are not recognized in Canada for those qualifications. [37]

Cultural identity

"After their arrival in Canadian society, immigrants and refugees are faced with two parallel decisions about their degree of emotional and behavioural investment in the home and host cultures:

- a decision about how much of their unique cultural identity they want to maintain, and
- a decision about their desired level of interaction with people who do not share their cultural heritage."[38]

The results of these decisions range from isolation to assimilation for the newcomer. Numerous studies show that commitment to both cultures, or biculturalism, is the most positive strategy. It involves the integration of home and host cultures in ways that work best for newcomers. [39]

> *"The systems that are in place to help newcomers settle have improved from the 1970s and 1980s. Multicultural orientation sessions try to help people to realize that they will adjust to life in Canada easier if they can leave behind those parts of their former identities based on tribes and status. Group activities, field trips and other economic and cultural experiences seem to help."*
>
> Frank Bessai
> Catholic Social Services

Loss of culture

Immigrants who lose a job in Canada also experience a loss of culture, undergoing an emotional-laden set of experiences:

- loss of cultural expertise (a knowing of the written and unwritten rules of gaining employment)
- loss of support groups in the former cultural setting[40]
- loss of a network of family and friends.

Pressure to find work

The work search process typically undertaken by immigrants is usually characterized by their persistence and willingness to take any job. The reasons for this are:

- financial necessity
- cultural pressure of being judged negatively for being out of work
- pressure to regain the status and dignity of having work as experienced in their previous culture
- pressure expressed as fear about their ability to sponsor others or the ability of those who sponsored them to sponsor others if they don't find work[41]
- pressure to send money home.[42]

> *"There may be many cultural factors at play that counsellors are not aware of. They need to listen and understand the implications of these. For example, career development may be a familiar concept to people in this part of the world, but in environments where doing whatever you can to survive is a primary objective, the notion of planning a career that suits your skills and talents may seem frivolous or unrealistic."*
>
> Betty Benson
> University of Alberta

Poverty

While each immigrant or visible minority group has unique concerns, a core problem is the poverty that is experienced by minority populations in greater proportion than the general population. Discrimination is a major issue but "the key element is not so much race or ethnicity so much as it is poverty."[43] In Alberta, children from visible minority and immigrant families are more than twice as likely as the general population to live in poverty. In fact, 26.7 per cent of visible minority children and 33 per cent of immigrant children who arrived in Alberta between 1996 and 2001 lived in poverty compared with 13.3 per cent of all children in Alberta.[44]

Employability issues

Some of the more common challenges that immigrants may face are identified as follows:[45]

Environmental

- lack of support services in some places
- lack of access to educational programs and training in some areas

Systemic

- culturally-biased counselling
- unnecessary job requirements
- non-recognition of credentials
- low-paying, low-skill jobs, higher education
- lack of promotions, seniority
- overemphasis on Canadian accent
- complicated process of obtaining professional licensure/certificate

Social

- deal with others' fears that newcomers are taking jobs away from Canadians
- subject to stereotypes about traits, qualifications, competence and motivation
- racial discrimination
- recipient of verbal and/or physical abuse

Personal

- lack of education and training
- lack of Canadian work experience
- lack of Canadian credentials
- lack of self-awareness
- lack of current or correct information
- lack of self-confidence
- different physical appearance, dress, habits
- limited proficiency in English

Language proficiency

Lack of English language proficiency can be the major employability challenge to people finding work or pursuing further education or training. Counselling interactions may also be more difficult due to a greater likelihood of misunderstandings, incorrect information and invalid assessments of peoples' goals and abilities.[46]

Sixty-one per cent of immigrants arriving in Canada in the 1990s spoke a language other than English or French at home. According to Statistics Canada, immigrants from China have the most difficulty conducting a conversation in an official language (29 per cent) followed by immigrants from India (15 per cent) and Taiwan (13 per cent).[47]

Sometimes people have so much difficulty learning and speaking English that they experience anxiety. Those who experience second-language anxiety may be "technically well qualified and competent but may be given a lower level task. Or, they may avoid anxiety-provoking situations that are potentially rewarding and could enhance their employment and career progress."[48] Second-language anxiety can create a vicious cycle where:

- people do not present themselves well
- others may respond impatiently or underestimate the client's abilities
- clients may begin to avoid verbal interaction and seek jobs that require little communication.[49]

Practitioners explain that sometimes newcomers find jobs where fellow countrymen are working and they can then speak their own language. Often they will get stuck there because they are not learning English. "Learning the language opens up the future."[50]

Work search skills

As newcomers search for work, they may be frustrated that their previously successful work search strategies are not effective in the Canadian context. Samunda and Wolfgang, Borgen and Amundson report that clients sometimes seek advice from members of their cultural group who are "similarly uninformed about effective ways to find employment. The end result of this situation is a steady emotional slide characterized by diminished energy, and a series of somatic side effects such as anxiety, sleep loss and weight loss."[51]

"Be supportive, respectful, collaborative and work towards understanding their situation before you jump to interventions. Develop a relationship with people first and find out their main priority. Many of them need your help to develop coping mechanisms."

Janet Hammel

Alberta Human Resources and Employment

Information

Practitioners indicate that newcomers sometimes report lack of accurate information as a barrier to successful work search. In general, newcomers may have:[52]

- misinformation from embassy staff or United Nations' staff in their home countries (ie. information that does not reflect what they are going to be able to do once they are in Canada)
- misunderstandings about the role of government institutions and settlement agencies in helping them find work
- lack of information about where and how to obtain employment information
- lack of information about the expectations of labour markets
- misunderstandings about educational and funding opportunities to improve English or upgrade their skills
- lack of familiarity with career progression and career ladders.[53]

It may be relevant to remember that in some countries, people are wary of government officials and only share information with officials when necessary.

In general, one of the consequences of having a language and communication barrier is "not being fully and accurately informed about the world of work and its related areas… [including] not knowing what career choices and opportunities are available and how to access them."[54]

Recognition of training and experience

One of the most frequently cited barriers is the lack of recognition for overseas qualifications. Even when qualifications are recognized, it is difficult for newcomers for whom English is a second language to compete for mainstream positions that require near-native proficiency.[55] Between October 2000 and September 2001, 124,700 immigrants came to Canada with one or more foreign credentials. After six months, only 14 per cent had their credentials assessed and accepted.[56] Recent newspaper articles point out the difficulties faced by those whose education and experience is from abroad. Even with "a newly formed national consensus that Canada must depend on using the skills of immigrants for future economic growth, potholes and pitfalls continue to abound."[57]

In recent years, programs have been created to help foreign-trained professionals and tradespeople pass qualifying exams and find placements using their skills and knowledge. Some articles point out the problems of the tentative funding that often accompanies such projects. Others focus on the successes and failures of these bridging programs: engineers finding meaningful work versus scientists making cinnamon buns for a living.[58] Practitioners, however, welcome integrating and bridging programs for professionals (for example, engineers, accountants, technologists) that begin the process of "Canadianizing" peoples' experience.[59]

A recent federal government report concludes that by 2011 immigration will account for all the net growth in Canada's labour force. [60] "To help immigrants use their skills to their full potential, the Government of Canada will have to work with all of its partners to ensure that immigrants successfully integrate into the Canadian labour market."[61] However, that will be a challenge. The director of the responsible body within Human Resources and Skills Development Canada points out that a national process would have to include not only "the federal health, industry and immigration departments but also more than 70 departments of the provinces and territories as well as more than 50 regulated professions with at least 400 regulatory bodies."[62]

Potential discrimination

In the workplace, employment equity and affirmative action policies address ways to provide equal opportunity to employment. However, racial discrimination and intercultural intolerance still exist. "The attitudes of employers have an important impact on the employment prospects and earnings of immigrants."[63] Some systemic issues faced by immigrants include:[64]

- subjective job interview and employee assessment
- the possibility for exploitation of uninformed or vulnerable workers
- racial practices
- social alienation
- misattribution of technical and social problems to racial or cultural traits of groups of newcomers.

When new immigrants do not speak the language well enough to deal with these issues effectively they may be unaware of their mistreatment and their rights. As a result, they may experience externalized or internalized anger, helplessness, reverse ethnic or racial prejudice toward the mainstream cultural group and other unresolved issues.[65]

> *"People will be successful if they see that they belong. They need their past experiences to be recognized, to find meaningful work and to be part of a community. They have dreams and they've come here to make better lives."*
>
> Sonia Bitar
>
> Changing Together: A Centre for Immigrant Women

Potentially biased testing

Often, common assessment tools such as tests of intelligence, interests and aptitudes lack validity for immigrant and minority clients due to:

- their unfamiliarity with activities listed
- a lack of appropriate norms
- difficulty to create validity of constructs across cultures
- clients' level of understanding of various test items.[66]

Responding to Challenges: Strategies and Practices

Counsellors who work effectively with people from a variety of cultural backgrounds begin by becoming aware of their own cultural origins, traditions and beliefs in order to understand the role of culture in their own lives. This enables practitioners to be more:

- appreciative of cultural differences
- flexible in meeting client needs
- open to learning about other cultures
- sensitive to clients' needs.[67]

In addition, counsellors need to be aware that their cultural background and milieu may, at times, result in their beliefs and world views contrasting with those of their clients. The process of professional reflection about personal culture supports the development of self-awareness, identified as a core competency in the domain of multicultural counselling.[68]

> *"Be understanding of peoples' needs, all their needs, including mental and physical health as these could be very important. There may be invisible barriers. Ask probing but sensitive questions."*
>
> Dick Bellamy
>
> Alberta Human Resources and Employment

Multicultural counselling

The key competencies associated with multicultural counselling have been identified by experts in the field as three core dimensions:

- self-awareness or beliefs
- knowledge
- skill.[69]

Some practitioners have augmented these key ingredients with others based on their own research. For example:

- understand the stressors that newcomers often experience
- trust the process
- be open to trying new methods.[70]

Knowledge of cultural diversity, while important, provides very little information about individual clients. The more critical piece is the importance of culture in the experience of people within their families, groups and communities.

It is very important that counsellors are flexible in their approaches to determine the experience of clients and work in ways that are meaningful to clients. This includes incorporating cultural inquiry into career counselling practice. In fact, it means realizing that "culture must be seen as a reciprocal process that is ever present in the career counselling relationship."[71] Understanding how the world of work is viewed and experienced by racially or ethnically diverse groups is an important skill for career counsellors. The Canadian Standards and Guidelines in Career Development recognize that the knowledge and skills of counselling diverse groups of people are core competencies in the field of career development.[72]

Practitioners write about cultural empathy as "gaining understanding about the ways that culture has influenced a client's life and communicating that understanding back to clients in a meaningful way."[73] Demonstrating cultural empathy allows counsellors to validate the strengths and accomplishments that they hear. Clients benefit by hearing what the career counsellor perceives as the cultural influences in their life. Some examples of useful topics include:[74]

- clients' beliefs about careers
- values about work roles
- role models
- gender roles
- beliefs about where the client should be in life
- how the family views different jobs.

"Skilful career counsellors may never have to ask directly about culture; rather they are able to guide individual clients through an assessment process that incorporates cultural inquiry."[75] Cross-cultural awareness, skills and knowledge can affect all aspects of the career counselling process from "relationship establishment to knowing which are the most culturally appropriate interventions or approaches for particular clients."[76]

> *"Set the tone of acceptance and understanding. Somehow indicate to clients that they have a great deal to teach you … If you listen and you respect the individual's understanding of their own problems and issues, then you're well on your way to developing some sort of collaborative solution."*
>
> **Betty Benson**
>
> **University of Alberta**

Relevant theories and approaches

Systems theory

Arthur and McMahon suggest using systems theory in multicultural career counselling. This framework basically "contains three interconnected systems of content influences: the individual system, the social system and the environmental/societal system… Clients are able to define themselves within their culture and elaborate the meaning of their culture"[77] and how it influences their career development.

The advantage of systems theory is that it helps counsellors understand that cultural influences are woven into clients' needs. Systems theory allows counsellors to focus on those aspects of culture that clients themselves consider to be most relevant in their lives. Therefore, any action plans or interventions that are considered will be culturally relevant for clients.

Systems theory also emphasizes the importance of working "towards improving the environmental and societal systems that impact people's career development."[78] This focus on social advocacy reminds counsellors that the barriers faced by clients are not within them but are systemic roadblocks that can be changed.

Constructivist theory

Constructivist theory suggests that the social group defines "objective reality" about experiences and phenomena such as healing, human behaviour and employment. Therefore, knowledge is socially constructed and varies from culture to culture. Constructivism encourages counsellors to refrain from making assumptions about what goals would be best for clients or what solutions would help them with their problems.[79]

Practitioners suggest that the constructivist approach is useful because counsellors help clients understand their strengths and what is meaningful to them. This is not a prescriptive approach but rather one that helps clients to learn more about themselves and what kind of work is available for them in their community.[80]

Solution-focused counselling[81]

This strength-based approach to counselling builds upon the foundation that everyone, no matter what their level of functioning, has strengths and resources. They may not be using their strengths and resources, they may be underusing them or they may have forgotten about them. The counsellor's role is to help clients identify their strengths and attributes by focusing on times when clients handled change well and by finding clues in their clients' past roles and accomplishments that would help identify interventions that are more likely to be successful.

Important to any empowerment-based approach is ensuring clients are mutually involved in determining goals, solutions and the pace and kinds of changes they will work toward. Building on clients' strengths and trusting that clients have solutions are important principles to follow.

> *"Help them to connect with others who are adapting. We're working with people to support them and help them move on to wherever it is they think they want to go. It's also giving people information about programs when it is appropriate and making good referrals."*
>
> Janet Hammel
>
> Alberta Human Resources and Employment

Multicultural Career Counselling Model

A Multicultural Career Counselling Model presented by John Stewart[82] promotes a series of assessment steps for career counsellors working with a heterogeneous population. During this assessment process, counsellors are encouraged to start any new interaction by allowing enough time to establish a relationship and to teach clients their role in this process. Counsellors are encouraged to:

- become knowledgeable about the cultural norms around personal space, eye contact and privacy
- learn when it is appropriate to ask direct and indirect questions, as some ethnic groups consider directness to be intrusive
- be aware that some clients may appear to be unwilling to share their emotions because such expressions are considered a sign of weakness in their cultural context.

Impact of cultural variables

The first level of assessment involves determining clients' world views in order to identify barriers to be addressed. World view is vital and complex and consists of:[83]

- locus of control—clients' decision making is influenced by whether a client comes from an individualistic or collectivist culture
- time orientation—clients' view of meetings, appointments and other time-specific events
- perceptions of human nature—how clients view others as basically good or a combination of good and bad
- family roles and relationships with others—particularly clients' views of work roles that are acceptable for men and women
- work values—self-reliance vs. group decision making and view of status differences between workers.

Once this first level of assessment has been carried out, counsellors will have a much better understanding of clients' values and beliefs and how these may or may not fit in with Canadian workplaces.

Personal career issues

The second level of assessment examines the immigrant's personal adjustment. Counsellors are encouraged to find out about clients' pre-migration experience and the circumstances of their leaving. A number of issues may arise and counsellors are encouraged to do research to understand more about these issues. Examples include:[84]

- the trauma associated with being refugees
- expectations of immigrants and refugees
- the experience of culture shock, with feelings of loss, isolation, loneliness and lack of support
- the stress accompanying clients' experiences of acculturation. Immigrants may acculturate faster than refugees, and younger immigrants usually integrate faster than older immigrants.

Employability

The third level of assessment considers various employability issues. The major goal of this phase of assessment is to help clients identify and understand issues that limit their career choices and to develop a plan to overcome these barriers. Potential barriers include:[85]

- language proficiency
- self-sufficiency
- recognition of prior learning
- discrimination
- knowledge of labour markets
- labour market expectations.

Addressing these issues will deal with the perceived and real barriers and challenges facing newcomers. The fourth step will likely involve developing and strategizing a variety of goals. These goals must be:

- pragmatic, recognizing that newcomers need to be in jobs as soon as possible
- collaborative, in that clients are actively involved in setting goals.[86]

Most clients need to get working or begin preparing for work as quickly as possible. Examples of goals that will help people in their work search activities are: "language training, resume writing, interviewing skills, getting Canadian work related experience, improving personal appearance, learning about the Canadian labour market and work expectations."[87]

> *"We need to be careful not to make assumptions about immigrants or refugees and their backgrounds. Take time to find out a bit about their immigration status and the circumstances leading up to their coming to Canada. You may be surprised to learn about the various countries they've lived in or the places they've received their education. If you keep current on world politics and issues, you'll be better able to understand some of the circumstances that prompt people to seek refugee status or to immigrate."*
>
> Julia Melnyk
>
> Springboard Consulting Inc.

Communicating with clients

Every client is unique, and every interaction with a client is a cross-cultural one. Working with people from other cultures simply makes this statement more obvious. A communication or language barrier between a counsellor and an immigrant client will hinder the counselling process in obvious ways. No matter which strength-based approach is used, counsellors need to be able to:[88]

- quickly assess the client's communication skills
- adapt their communication style accordingly
- alter how they engage clients in the career-building process.

There are three skill areas that are important when working with individuals whose first language is not English:[89]

- written communication skills—clearly written notes may be used by clients with their friends and family. Writing notes for clients also helps them keep track of what they are exploring or doing next. New and unfamiliar names and places should be written down.
- spoken communication skills—clients have varying levels of formality and directness in their speaking style. Many people learning English are able to make social conversation but may not be able to express their feelings well or speak theoretically.

- nonverbal communication skills—culturally determined, nonverbal communication is open to misinterpretation. Eye contact and personal distancing vary among cultures and may indicate respect or shyness. Ask clients to explain gestures or expressions that are unclear as this will be a chance to clarify the Canadian equivalent.

In helping clients build on their communication skills, practitioners recommend:

- teaching clients the importance of good first impressions
- helping clients learn the technical vocabulary related to work search and training
- teaching clients the conventions of small talk and politeness.[90]

Helping clients address discrimination

Herr and Cramer encourage counsellors to "help culturally different individuals understand that although they may encounter discrimination, they cannot be discouraged by it or consider themselves perpetual victims of it. They can be taught to deal with it and to use the resources available to surmount it." [91]

Melnyk notes that visible minority immigrants may encounter "covert discrimination or racial prejudice in their job search." [92] Counsellors can help clients deal with both covert and open discrimination by:

- assisting them with appropriate, assertive but polite responses to discriminatory remarks
- role playing with clients to help them respond to discrimination in a socially acceptable way that allows them to maintain a sense of personal dignity.
- making clients aware of their rights and responsibilities under human rights legislation.

Using assessment tools and other materials

Counsellors are encouraged to consider the following questions:[93]

- Is the client familiar with the activities discussed or surveyed?
- Is the view of a job the same from one culture to another?
- Are the assumptions of the constructs on which a particular interest inventory is developed valid across cultures?
- Is the language appropriate?
- Is the job or profession itself culture-specific?
- To what degree is this client free to make career decisions as opposed to deciding on the basis of family or societal pressure?

Questions like the following may help to determine if career-related and labour market materials are free of cultural bias:[94]

- Are the names (in examples) from a variety of multicultural backgrounds?
- Do the photos feature visible minorities in appreciable numbers?
- Are analogies drawn appropriately across socioeconomic levels?
- Do the values presented represent more than the values of the dominant culture?
- Do the stories and pictures portray a range of behaviours or do they show cultural stereotypes?
- Is the reading level appropriate for clients?

Focusing on Employment

According to the most recent (2001) Canadian census, the majority of immigrants arriving in Canada between 1991 and 2001 were 25 to 64 years of age. Forty-six per cent were 25 to 44 years old compared with 31 per cent of the total population. Newcomers aged 45 to 64 years made up an additional 17 per cent. A further 11 per cent were school age children and teens, five to 16 years old, beginning their career journey.[95] Both newcomers and immigrants who have lived in Canada for a number of years may require assistance to connect to the Canadian labour market.

Use or develop appropriate interventions

- Group interventions such as job clubs can be the most supportive for people from collectivist cultures.[96] Family members are also important supports to include in clients' work search.
- Approaches such as job shadowing, work experience, mentoring and on-the-job training opportunities are effective for helping newcomers adjust to the labour market.[97]

> *"People do so many interesting things and they have so many skills to build upon. We help people focus on language first and then move forward, not backward. We teach them about their rights and we help them understand the work opportunities out there. We have them networking and feeling good about themselves. There are lots of grey areas and we know it. But counsellors can give hope or take it away."*
>
> Sonia Bitar
>
> Changing Together: A Centre for Immigrant Women

- Current print and video resources are useful to instruct as well as to promote reading and understanding English.[98]
- Immigrants who do not have foreign credentials may benefit from creating and using an electronic portfolio. Portfolio building is becoming more common in high schools and it is growing in other countries as well as in Canada. It is a strategy that young people, in particular, can enjoy because the focus is on all the formal and informal learning and experiences they have had that could translate into personal strengths such as transferable skills.[99]

Suggestions from practitioners

- Help clients who possess foreign credentials and experience by:

- being aware of how foreign qualifications are assessed
- knowing where to send clients or their documents for translation and qualifications assessment
- being able to explain the process and timelines to clients.[100]

- Help newcomers create a résumé that captures what they've done. It is important that you help them transfer their own past experiences into skills and knowledge that will be meaningful to Canadian employers.
- It is essential to use every resource available to connect clients with opportunities that will give them work experience in their field, sector, trade or profession. People, print publications, websites, agencies, government programs and volunteer opportunities are all examples of employment-related resources.
- Refer clients to programs that will help prepare them to enter the labour market or return to training.
- Practice the communication skills required of clients during work search. Help them become as comfortable and competent as possible before they interact with employers.[101]
- Immigrant clients need to be coached about all the written and unwritten rules of the culturally-specific process of finding work.
- Coach clients regarding workplace expectations and workplace cultures.[102]

Post-employment support

Due to any of the considerations identified in this chapter (for example, culture shock and the need to establish a new occupational identity, understanding workplace culture and norms or dealing with issues of discrimination), clients from other cultural backgrounds may unexpectedly find themselves running into problems after being in the workplace. While identifying the potential for such issues beforehand is important, sometimes these issues do not arise until a person is actually employed. Post-employment support may involve facilitating discussions or referrals, problem solving, explanation and debriefing.[103]

In Conclusion

Immigration currently accounts for 70 per cent of Canada's population growth as compared with 20 per cent in the 1970s. It is predicted that within 25 years, immigration will be the only source of Canada's net population growth, as deaths will outnumber births in Canada.[104] Therefore, it is anticipated that career development practitioners throughout the country will increasingly be engaged in multicultural counselling.

"…[Cross-cultural] preparation is a life work that depends on personal development and reflective professional practice."[105] Practitioners suggest the following to enhance cross-cultural expertise:

- Read literature by writers from different cultures.

- Attend conferences or workshops where aspects of multicultural counselling are discussed.
- Become more familiar with the range of settlement services in your community.
- Stay informed about world affairs, including migration patterns.
- Explore current trends in providing service to multicultural groups that are evolving in other disciplines (for example, mental health services).
- Stay up to date about relevant programs in the community.
- Take opportunities to advocate for newcomers, both with community groups and employers' associations.

"Newcomers know that their grandchildren will be born here and will tell the story of them coming to Canada."

Frank Bessai

Catholic Social Services

Websites and Resource Organizations

Alberta Human Resources and Employment. Alberta Learning Information Service (ALIS). Retrieved on July 14, 2005, from **www.alis.gov.ab.ca**

- *CERTinfo* provides information about certification and registration of occupations and trades
- *OCCinfo* and *EDinfo* are occupational information and educational program directories
- provides information and links to students finance, career planning, career resources

Alliance of Credential Evaluation Services of Canada. Retrieved on July 9, 2005, from **www.canalliance.org**

- a provincially mandated assessment service across Canada
- provides credential assessment for those applying for employment, education or professional membership

Amnesty International. Retrieved on July 5, 2005, from **www.amnesty.org**

- a worldwide movement to promote internationally recognized human rights

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- builds networks between internationally trained professionals, industry, regulatory bodies and government in British Columbia

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CHAPTER 5

Older Workers

WHATWORKS?

Career–building Strategies for People From Diverse Groups

Older Workers

Older Workers

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Older Workers

What do I wish I had known when I started working with older workers?

"I wish I had understood more about the emotional part of things. I didn't really understand how hard people were hit with job loss."

Faye Haney

Career Management Specialist

Introduction

Statistics

In 2002, Canadian workers aged 45 to 64 numbered 7.6 million and comprised 35.7 per cent of the working age population. Statistics Canada projects in 2006 that figure will be 8.7 million people or 38.8 per cent of the working age population.[1] This statistic has been projected to rise to 41 per cent by the year 2011.[2]

In Canada, 25 to 54 year olds had a labour force participation rate of 85 per cent in 2001.[3] In 2003, Canadians in the 55 to 64 age bracket had a 51 per cent labour force participation rate, representing nine per cent of the total labour force.[4] By 2021, workers 55 to 64 years old will make up nearly 15 per cent of Canada's workforce.[5] In Alberta, the participation rate for older workers in 2003 was 59.2 per cent, slightly higher than the national rate. [6]

In 2004, older workers in Alberta experienced greater job growth than any other group of adults by age. In fact, those aged 45 to 64 represented 89.7 per cent of the province's overall job growth. [7] Trends indicate that the demand for skilled older workers will increase in many sectors of the work world. "The continued skill development of older workers can provide workplaces with a pool of experienced, motivated and engaged employees in an era in which older adults will comprise a greater proportion of the population."[8] Working with older workers allows insight into issues and situations that will be of great value to the labour force for at least the next two decades.

General Characteristics

Who are older workers?

Older workers are described as those over 45, over 50 or 55, or even over 60 or 64 years depending upon the purpose or the sponsor of any particular report or program. Older workers are also known as mature workers, near retirees, experienced workers, midlife adults and working seniors.

In general, Canadians are living longer healthier lives and the pattern and potential of their career span is changing. People in late midlife represent a continuum from those who are healthy and experiencing satisfying work to others who are vulnerable and unable to secure gainful employment. Adults in late midlife may:[9]

- choose to retire and then embark on a new career path
- stay in the workforce because they find the work satisfying and rewarding
- stay in the workforce because they do not have sufficient funds to retire
- stay in the workforce but fear lay off
- lose their jobs involuntarily and need to seek new employment
- have excessive caregiving duties
- want to combine work and other lifestyle options.

"A number of factors and trends are contributing to the increase in older adults in the work force, including demographics, financial concerns, changing concepts of retirement, longer and healthier life spans, and demand for the knowledge and skills possessed by the current generation of older workers."[10]

Susan Imel

Author

Practitioners report that people at midlife may feel reflective about whether or not there is going to be another opportunity to change what they've been doing or another chance to follow a dream.[11] The later years are increasingly becoming a time of searching and experimenting.

Older workers in the job market can be categorized as voluntary or involuntary career changers. *Voluntary career changers* are seeking more meaningful, more enjoyable or different employment. They challenge the belief that decisions made in midlife should carry older workers through to retirement.[12]

Involuntary career changers are people who, despite their satisfactory or exemplary employment records, may have been:

- laid off because of cutbacks, downsizing, mergers and organizational restructuring
- laid off because of outdated skills or outmoded work roles or job classifications
- forced out due to health issues
- required to work for the income
- unable to secure a job despite their best efforts
- manoeuvred into early retirement and want to re-enter the workforce to supplement their income.[13]

When older workers experience deteriorating health and cannot return to the work that they see as their role in life, this has a major impact on their self-esteem and self-worth.[14] In addition, some laid-off older workers may be immigrants, seasonally employed, semi-skilled or skilled in one kind of work, and have a history of job loss and periods of unemployment. Many of these people save for and look forward to retirement for years. Therefore, lay off that occurs later in life can result in a huge loss in savings, accepted views of the future and sense of control.[15]

Other older workers, primarily women, may enter or re-enter the workforce as an adjustment to a *major life transition*[16] such as:

- child-launching—particularly when the last child leaves home
- widowhood—for financial reasons, such as to supplement a pension or to create one's own pension
- divorce—particularly if the departing spouse was earning the major amount of income
- retirement—to return to the workforce for many reasons, often due to financial issues or professional identity.

> *"Many of the people we work with are women, suddenly single. They have been moms and wives, have raised a family and contributed through volunteer work, but they may not have held jobs for years. The majority of men were divorced and now are in a second family. They worked predominantly in the oilfields, away a lot and don't want to go down that road again. They are looking at what they can do with the rest of their life that will help them to sustain the first family and give them quality of life with the second family."*
>
> Barb Sheppard
>
> Career Assistance Network

Whether older workers are voluntary or involuntary career changers, they often share common issues:

- rapid technological changes and their lack of experience with technology
- the need to update their skills frequently
- changing views about when it is suitable to retire
- concern about when and if they will have enough retirement income
- concern that nobody will ever hire them again
- concern about whether they are too old to make significant changes
- concern about redundancy
- lack of current work search skills.[17]

"I tell pre-retirement workshop participants that nobody owes them a job. Sometimes they think they are retirement planning but really they are escape planning. I say this because I really want them to evaluate whether they should leave their job. Until their focus is forward instead of back, it's really hard to do career counselling with them. When the focus is forward, you can get them thinking about "What could I be doing that will generate a life that is better than what I have?"

Rein Selles

Retirement/Life Challenge Ltd.

Older workers and retirement

Issues that focus on the older worker inevitably overlap with issues related to retirement. Canada does not have a statutory retirement age, but age 65 is most often the milestone used in collective agreements and corporate human resources practices.

Retirement is "no longer an end. It's a turning point. A chance to take a break and then reinvent yourself."[18] Many older people are making retirement a process, not a single event.[19] "Older workers choose shorter hours as a personal preference; for many, it is a transition phase…."[20] A 2002 Statistics Canada report indicates that almost one-third of people who retired between 1992 and 2002 "would have continued working if they had been offered part-time employment."[21]

Furthermore, almost 12 per cent of the population aged 65 to 69 were in the workforce in 2001.[22] Many of these people are self-employed. In fact, "working seniors are four times more likely than people aged 15 to 64 to be working owners of a small business with no hired help."[23] Retirement is changing and may no longer be the culmination of one's working years or the complete cessation of working for financial gain.

Career development looks at the whole person throughout the lifespan. At a time when 70-year-olds run marathons and start new businesses, and life expectancy is 77 years for men and almost 82 years for women,[24] practitioners may wish to re-examine their own beliefs about aging, attachment to the world of work and retirement for older clients.

Brenda Milner, who, at 86, is still a professor of neuropsychology at McGill University, says that "she'll keep going as long as her work is 'scientifically credible' and can continue to get her grants to do her research. In fact, she believes, such credibility is the key to anyone's decision to continue working." [25]

The Globe and Mail

Midlife issues

The aging process can be viewed in terms of change and continuity. Upon reaching a certain age, people don't suddenly experience major physical and psychological changes. The normal aging process unfolds so gradually that people are not always aware of it. Many of the myths attributed to age actually describe abnormal processes of disease, experienced by only a small portion of the older population. The ability to adapt to the physiological changes that occur with age develops gradually, like a seventh sense that allows us "to look at aging not as a disease but as a normal process."[26]

Instead of adding on years to the ends of their lives, people are expanding or increasing their options in their middle-age years. In fact, many people in their 50s and 60s are redefining this stage of their lives. The middle years have been defined as a time when "we control much of what happens in our life and can often act on the world, rather than habitually react to whatever the world throws at us."[27] Practitioners note when older clients discuss their life ahead, "it is the middle years that expand in the expanding life expectancy, not the later, frailer years."[28]

Several websites, such as the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety and the Alberta Workers' Compensation Board, address issues like injury, illness and the physical and cognitive functioning of the aging worker.[29] There are also a variety of studies that point out "there is no significant difference between the productivity of older and younger workers: 'in almost every study, variations within an age group far exceed the average differences between age groups'."[30] The federal government summarizes these midlife issues, stating that older workers:[31]

- work for personal and/or financial reasons
- are less subject to work-related accidents
- can be as productive as younger workers
- are capable of learning new technologies
- can acquire new skills effectively when appropriate training programs are available.

Indeed, it seems that there is a shift in focus underway, from helping older workers to retire to retaining them or helping them to search for jobs. Both workers and their work worlds have needs and requirements. Counsellors employ a variety of tools and techniques in order to help older clients and employers respond to each other's requirements.[32]

Employment practices

Employment practices are sometimes based on fallacies and misperceptions about older workers. Older workers may have to convince employers they do not fit the stereotypes. Counsellors can help older workers prepare to challenge these misperceptions by encouraging older workers to examine their own beliefs about aging, as well as helping clients identify the assets they bring to the workplace.

Personal circumstances

Older workers who have been laid off or forced into early retirement may be trying to navigate through a maze of personal circumstances over which they may feel little control. The percentage of older adults who are healthy is growing, but health problems do increase steadily with age.[33] Incidents of chronic illness, functional impairment and physical disabilities climb as people live their lives.[34] In addition, older adults are often responsible for aging parents, ailing spouses and grandchildren.[35] A study of workers 45 to 75 found that for many, particularly the baby boomers, "juggling family and career 'dominates their views and decisions about work'."[36]

Financial concerns

Older unemployed workers with dependents, a mortgage and/or other debt, may feel anxious about the prospect of financial ruin. The longer they are out of work, the more their resources will be depleted.

Emotional crises

It can be traumatic for people to be laid off because their skills are considered obsolete or their contribution is no longer required by a workplace. These circumstances may also stir up deep feelings of shame and embarrassment. The loss of a job may cause people to:

- lose their sense of identity
- lose their sense of self-worth
- lower their assessment of their abilities
- experience embarrassment about being unemployed, collecting employment insurance or looking for work instead of going to work
- withdraw from friends and family at a time when they most need support.[37]

Self-limiting attitudes

The attitudes and expectations of older workers themselves may be some of the major obstacles they have to overcome. Examples of self-limiting attitudes include:

- Tunnel vision: older workers, who have been in one work role for many years, may place limits on their potential and may lack confidence beyond the boundaries of their own field. Counsellors report that laid-off older workers struggle to reframe their experiences into the kinds of language that can be more helpful to them in their job search.[38]
- Fear of risk-taking: some older workers have focused on minimizing risk and maximizing security. The thought of venturing out in any new direction may cause them to worry about changing the established routines for themselves and their families.[39]
- Age bias: some older workers believe they are declining mentally and physically with age. This attitude can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Rather than attribute problems in the workplace to changes in themselves, their work or their environment, some workers blame their age.[40]

Responding to Challenges: Strategies and Practices

Practitioners explain that in addition to offering career and employment counselling and workshops, extra attention needs to be paid in helping older workers to:[41]

- cope with job loss
- identify their strengths
- build self-confidence
- identify and implement their goals
- examine work alternatives
- update their work search
- manage age issues.

Helping older workers cope with job loss

Older workers are far less likely than younger workers to experience job loss.[42] However, those that do experience job loss could take up to a year to find a suitable replacement job. Their average period of unemployment is higher than that of youth and of persons 25 to 44 years old. In fact, 63 per cent of laid-off older workers will still be out of work a year later, compared with 30 per cent of younger workers.[43]

Research indicates that many workers, aged 55 to 64, who did not find a new job within a reasonable period of time, appear to be economically vulnerable. The most common reasons why workers aged 55 to 64 generally have more difficulty than younger workers in finding replacement jobs are:[44]

- They are concentrated in traditional industries that are growing more slowly than in previous decades.
- They have held jobs that require limited qualifications and low levels of education compared to current qualifications.
- They tend to look for similar jobs to those they've recently held.

Using this information, older clients may need help to counter these findings and prepare for an extended job search process. In helping older clients cope with job loss, the first step is to help them understand that their reaction may run through a range of normal responses, including:

- feelings of anger, depression, anxiety, loss, fear, confusion, frustration and in some instances, relief
- physical complaints like insomnia, high blood pressure, headaches, colds and changes in appetites.

In order to move on, clients need to realize that they are not alone in these kinds of responses: job loss is traumatic. Clients may benefit from group support from other older workers coping with job loss.

"Stages of Recovery from Job Loss

1. Emotions will vary from shock to anger to relief.
2. People will become resigned to the situation.
3. Growth and new direction will occur."

Faye Haney
Career Management Specialist

In some cases clients may require personal psychological counselling with an appropriate agency or counsellor. Assist by providing facilitated referrals to appropriate professionals whenever possible.

Encourage any *angry* clients to:

- channel anger into non-violent physical activity, for example, exercising, playing a favourite sport (racquet ball, tennis) or game (video, pinball)
- write a letter addressed to whomever they choose, expressing their feelings and then burning or shredding it.

Encourage any *depressed* clients to:

- exercise
- seek relief in laughter (for example, rent a comedy video)
- create a schedule for the day and stick to it
- volunteer
- nourish themselves through sleep, relaxation and healthy eating
- talk to and stay connected with family and friends.

Practitioners recognize that older clients benefit by receiving support in building and maintaining positive attitudes about their skills and attributes.[45]

Help clients:

- distinguish between confusing temporary rejection as a worker and rejection as a human being
- discuss the actual reasons for job loss and help clients clarify why they are now, temporarily, not working
- begin to work on identifying their strengths.

> *"Sometimes people feel that if they don't get the job, it's ageism. Employers have high demands and want to hire people who are entrepreneurial in nature."*
> Barb Sheppard
> Career Assistance Network

Helping older workers identify their strengths

When older workers acknowledge the strengths they bring to the workplace, they will rebuild or enhance their self-esteem, gain confidence and have trust in their own abilities. The resulting changes in attitude may make a significant difference to the success of their work search. The values that older workers embody can be strong selling points in today's job market. Many older workers tend to be:[46]

- loyal—more likely to stay in their position than to look for new jobs and more likely to be committed to the organization's goals
- reliable—lower rates of absenteeism and turnover than younger workers
- productive—as productive as younger workers and may outperform younger workers in some white collar positions
- safe workers—take fewer risks, have fewer accidents and accomplish as much in a workday as younger workers
- literate—with their education in the three R's, they possess the basic skills employers need
- flexible and adaptable—older people face numerous changes in later life and have had to cope with advancing technology, the effects of globalization and a growing and diverse workplace.

It is most important that mature clients know how to articulate these values and how they fit into today's workplace.

Mature clients often possess a wealth of experience and ability but may be reluctant to discuss their experience or may be unaware that the skills they take for granted may be highly marketable. Identifying and discussing transferable skills will help clients:

- regain lost confidence
- identify more strengths
- start thinking about possible career alternatives
- write effective résumés, letters and other promotional tools
- recognize what they have to offer an employer
- articulate their skills and other assets during a job search
- begin to prepare for self-employment
- write a business plan.[47]

> *"People have many skills and when they leave, these skills don't stay behind in their old job but are portable. It is so important to help them identify their skills and things they are proud of having done—peak moments in their lives and when they worked with passion."*
> Nell Smith
> Career Transitions Consultant

The following are some examples of the attributes that older workers have to offer employers:

- experience and transferable skills
- maturity and level-headedness
- commitment to the company's goals or products and services
- experience working with teams
- interest in mentoring others
- responsible and dependable
- statistically lower accident rates
- low absenteeism rates
- proven ability to meet deadlines

- experience with diversity in the workplace
- experience in coping with stress.[48]

A variety of instruments and strategies may help older clients explore their values, needs, wants, skills, interests, personality characteristics, beliefs and satisfactions in their career so far:[49]

- discussing pride experiences[50]
- creating a self-portrait[51]
- building an inventory of dependable strengths or signature strengths[52]
- creating a career path analysis[53]
- drawing a lifeline[54]
- using a life wheel[55]
- assessment tools such as Quester[56]
- publications such as *A Guide for Midlife Career Moves*[57]
- using a variety of self-work activities on values, beliefs, skills, personality characteristics, personal style, needs, desires and dreams.[58]

Counsellors find that in today's job market, exploring values, interests, beliefs and goals may be just as vital as identifying skills to finding employment. This is because many older workers are looking for more meaning in their working lives.[59]

The purpose of these, and other tools and techniques, is to:

- examine clients' responses to major life events, whether positive or negative
- help clients analyse their adaptability to change
- acknowledge successes
- discuss and clarify skills
- coach people on transferring their strengths to new situations
- help clients think about which strengths they want to take into the future.[60]

What is satisfying about counselling older workers?

"It's hearing wonderful stories of careers and the interesting things that people have done. Older adults know what they want—they give you indicators of their success. Everyone has strengths and I let people know that I'm wowed by what they can do. You just can't give people too much positive feedback—everybody is aching for it."

Bonnie Young
Career Transition Counsellor

Accessing support

Another important asset to examine is the support group or network of associates and contacts of older clients. Counsellors often need to help people identify sources of support and clients may need to learn how to ask for the help they need. Effective marketing starts with those friends, colleagues and contacts that are closest to clients. In so doing, clients will focus on identifying supportive people and engaging them in the job search campaign.[61]

If you are working with older clients, you may want to refer them to programs in the community that offer peer support. Alternatively, explore the possibility of setting up a support group or helping clients to do so. This can be the most effective strategy in work search, to provide moral support and encouragement as well as information and contacts.

"Job search is a lonely business. I often warn clients about the roller-coaster ride of searching and help them prepare for the down times when there appears to be no activity in the job market (for example, no ads, no leads from friends). Then people must become more creative in the search process, and get themselves into research mode."

Bonnie Young
Career Transition Counsellor

Finances
Older clients may need to be referred to a financial expert with whom they can discuss money and lifestyle issues. Older workers exploring alternatives need to be realistic about their financial situation. Are they in financial trouble? Do they know what they're worth? Are they knowledgeable about their financial assets? These questions can be addressed with the help of financial or pre-retirement planners.[62] There are also a variety of publications and websites that address financial issues.

Helping older workers build self-confidence

Albert Bandura's work addresses self-efficacy, which can be defined as self-confidence or positive beliefs about one's capability to perform a task.[63] Self-efficacy is one of the key predictors of whether a person will choose to pursue a task or goal. Therefore, self-efficacy is a prerequisite to people taking charge of their own learning, career development and goal setting.

Maurer suggests that focusing on particular areas such as self-management skills, idea generation and computer use helps older clients to counter self-limiting beliefs and build self-efficacy.[64] Practitioners describe the importance of challenging older workers' self-limiting beliefs in order to help them build confidence and move on.[65]

> *"You need to learn how to read a person to connect with them. You can crush a person's self-esteem if you don't tune into their pride. Men in particular are very sensitive about their accomplishments, about what they've done in their lifetime. Women are usually more flexible about moving forward. An expression I've heard others use seems appropriate, 'You have to rip that rear-view mirror off the windshield and move forward. Let's focus on where we're going.'"*
>
> Barb Sheppard
> Career Assistance Network

Self-confidence also rises when older clients tackle tasks that previously frightened them. Offering functional computer literacy to older workers helps them overcome their fears of technology and move forward into spreadsheets, e-mail, word processing and the Internet.[66] Another idea is to expose older workers to opportunities like Toastmasters clubs. Once participants become comfortable, their self-confidence soars.[67]

Helping older workers stay current

Informed decisions are the most creative and effective. Helping clients gain access to the information they need is particularly important for older workers who may be, or who feel they are, out of date. Provide older clients with relevant information or know where to send them to find more about:

- occupations and work roles people play in the local economy
- local, regional and national labour markets
- training programs and possible funding sources.

Information interviews
Older workers are wary of making a wrong choice or wasting time by pursuing a job or opportunity they won't like. Information interviews allow them the opportunity to gather first-hand information about the line of work they are considering. However, most clients are reluctant to conduct this type of research. Try to determine the amount of support clients require (for example, facilitating an initial contact for them) and help them develop skills for managing these interviews.

Practising various scenarios and taping your clients are some ways to help them prepare. Group support may be the best way to help people "measure the pulse of the labour market, watch the trends and stay in the driver's seat."[68]

Focusing on Employment

Helping older workers update their work search

Helping older clients conduct effective work search campaigns and obtain new positions depends upon their needs and the requirements in the sectors and communities in which they're looking. Counsellors need to help older clients see that the work search

"I encourage people to get current. Look at temporary employment agencies and part-time work or contracting—anything can lead to other opportunities. Older workers need encouragement to try different things. What might you do next? Work on the attitude shift to focus on the next thing."
Nell Smith
Career Transitions Consultant

process is one of creativity, communication and planning. Serendipity plays a role as well.

Creativity and work search

Getting more creative in work search means taking actions like reading the business sections of newspapers to see which companies are promoting expansions, opening new branches, taking over other companies and so on. One can then do some research about these events, trying to find a person to talk to about what is coming in the next few months, sometimes identifying opportunities even before they are advertised. Sometimes the conversation will be around how busy a particular company/office/branch will likely be and clients might ask whether additional help might be needed. For the person who is flexible enough to take a contract or part-time work, an opportunity may be presented that perhaps could short circuit the advertising process. Also, companies that have a policy of posting positions may not necessarily have to post contract or part-time work.[69]

Some older workers may still have old beliefs about how one looks for work. One of those beliefs might be that they should not "bother" employers. These kinds of assumptions can get in the way of people being creative in their job search. They may also need some help in understanding the difference between bragging and selling yourself—speaking confidently about what you are good at and can do with little supervision.[70]

Communication and work search

The need for effective communication spans the entire work search process, from teaching and coaching clients about staying current about the labour market to preparing clients to communicate with employers.

An important beginning is to focus on the way clients promote themselves. Listen carefully to hear what people are saying and how they are saying it. "The purpose of this is that you cannot let clients go off on their job search if they might turn people off, annoy them or burn bridges. For example, a potential supervisor does not want to hear about 'the way we used to do that.' People usually have very little patience for that kind of explanation. If we're going to prepare people, we need to *not* set them up for failure."[71]

A second important point with regard to communication is to coach older clients to focus on talking about times when they have made changes. Help clients to become aware of the breadth of changes they've made in their lives and the many skills they have used to do so. Older clients may minimize what they've done and take their accomplishments for granted.

The counsellor and client both require persistence to take apart the résumé and rebuild it several times, to discuss the content for unique cover letters and to practise various interview scenarios. "These activities are all necessary in this market because clients must look at what employers want and speak to that directly."[72]

In so doing, it is crucial to coach clients to answer interview questions with results-based answers. "If they have been in only a couple of work roles or been in one company or one sector for a long time, one perception may be that they don't know how to be adaptable and flexible." [73] Communication to potential future employers must stress results and accomplishments.

"When you are counselling older clients you'll hear them say, 'Oh, I've done that, and I've lived through four bosses in the last eight years, or I've had to change my way of doing things because I had to report to managers at a distance." What are all these events if not coping with constant change?"
Bonnie Young
Career Transition Counsellor

A third important piece of communication relates to follow-up. During the work search, any number of events can happen without work seekers being aware of them. There may be changes in the company, an internal employee moved into an available job or responsibilities attendant to the job might have been merged into others' work roles in a brief time period. As well, the practice these days is that letters are seldom, if ever, sent to job applicants. The only way clients would ever find out about the status of an application is for them to continually engage in that most often neglected task in work search: follow up. [74]

Planning and work search

"It's very important to help people think about timelines and plan when they're going to do a job search."[75] Job seekers need to have the energy to conduct an active and ongoing search and they also need to consider when there will be breaks in the action. Clients will be more effective if they are aware of the job search seasons in the sectors in which they are interested. It's not unusual to respond to an ad or pursue a job lead in June and hear back on it around the end of September. July and August, in many industries, are "forced holidays" for job seekers. Sometimes clients will respond to job openings toward the end of the year but hear nothing until mid-January. The work search seasons may change according to the sector and the community, so it is imperative that clients determine:

- when the breaks usually occur and what events cause hiring to be paused
- how to maximize their time when recruitment and selection processes have been temporarily halted
- how to use their energy well when opportunities to engage with employers are more abundant.[76]

> *"People who are employable speak with confidence, demonstrate social skills, are energetic, look current and talk about the present and the future. They talk about their willingness to learn and actually demonstrate that by trying new things. They've also learned to build and use their network of associates."*
>
> Nell Smith
>
> Career Transitions Consultant

Helping older workers deal with employers and age issues

Education is one strategy in dealing with age biases based on fallacies and misinformation. Help older clients to become:

- familiar with the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, as well as human rights and equity legislation in their province
- ready to use every opportunity to educate employers and organizations with respect to the benefits of hiring older workers
- comfortable working through alternate ways of handling employment practices or comments that may be discriminatory.

Experienced counsellors help older clients prepare for difficult interview questions and encourage them to have the courage to bring up topics themselves if they sense that some issues are simmering. This preparation takes courage on the part of the counsellor as well, since counsellors need to be able to help people cope with difficult questions that potential employers will likely ask.

Helping older workers explore work alternatives

Practitioners report that clients often only see themselves as they've been; they don't see themselves in other work roles. Furthermore, many older clients worry that they will never get another full-time job.[77] These older adults, having assumed they would be employed until *they* chose to retire, may be unaware of the educational opportunities and the range of support available to them. Similarly, they could be out of touch with the rapidly changing realities of today's work dynamic and alternative opportunities for jobs and work.[78]

In counselling older workers to reconcile some or all of their goals and interests with the realities of the workplace, encourage them to consider some of the growing alternatives to the traditional full-time job, including:

- one permanent, part-time job combined with other small part-time jobs or contracts
- phased retirement, reducing hours or responsibilities
- long-term contract with one employer

- several short-term contracts with different employers
- job or work sharing
- part-time work
- consulting
- home-based businesses
- self-employment
- training or mentoring positions.[79]

Work alternatives may offer the most opportunities for older workers wishing to use different sets of skills or pursue a long-time dream or passion. Employers may be very open to creating flexible work arrangements because they value the contribution made by older workers.

Self-employment and home-based businesses are also becoming popular ways of working. Some people are ready to work differently, often more independently. There are government programs and community-based agencies that can assist individuals who are interested in starting their own business.

Helping older workers continue to learn

One of the key ways in which older workers can overcome barriers to employment is to ensure they have the skills appropriate to their chosen direction. If clients determine that their skills and knowledge need to be upgraded or enhanced, help them explore educational alternatives.

If older workers prefer not to return to the classroom full time, they may be able to gather the skills or credentials needed through:

- a mentor
- a volunteer position
- self-study (web-based or distance learning)
- apprenticeship
- training on the job
- evening adult education courses
- work/study programs
- on-line courses.[80]

Programs that offer on-the-job training may be especially well suited to some older workers. On-the-job training would allow older workers to acquire new skills in the workplace. For some, being employed, even at a lower wage, may be preferable to the stress and uncertainty of trying to obtain future employment after an extensive period of retraining.

In Conclusion

The constantly changing workplace and increasing longevity of workers are providing more choices for the older worker. We are in the process of redefining older worker, aging and retirement. Opportunities to work with older workers in your counselling practice will challenge you to keep up with the trends, services and issues facing this diverse group of people.

> *"With the proper coaching, people will go after what they really want. They go do things, they have energy and they are right on top of things. They need support and this is all about being sensitive, respectful and helpful. They also need structure and information. Support, structure and information—those are the keys."*
>
> Faye Haney
>
> Career Management Specialist

Websites and Resource Organizations

50Plus. Retrieved on April 8, 2005, from **www.50plus.com**

- offers lifestyle, community and commerce information for those over 50
- home of the advocacy group CARP, Canadian Association of Retired People

Alberta Human Resources and Employment. *Alberta labour market review.* Retrieved on April 10, 2005, from **www.gov.ab.ca/hre/lmi/lfstats.asp**

- provides current statistical data pertaining to Alberta: employment, immigration, wages

Alberta Human Resources and Employment. *What Works–Alberta* newsletter. Government of Alberta. Retrieved March 28, 2005, from **www.gov.ab.ca/hre/whatworksalberta/pdf/wwa_1203.pdf**

- a special edition offering facts, resources and programs for and about the older worker and employers

Canada Career Consortium. Retrieved April 10, 2005, from **careerccc.org**

- a national forum that initiates, develops and co-ordinates career and labour market information

Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety. Aging workers. Retrieved on April 11, 2005, from **www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/psychosocial/aging_workers.html**

- has descriptions of many of the health, wellness and psychosocial issues of aging

Centre on Aging, University of Victoria. Retrieved on May 31, 2005, from, **www.coag.uvic.ca**

- a multidisciplinary social science research centre that promotes and conducts research throughout the lifespan

Virtual Community Resource Centre, York Region District School Board. *Forty-five plus: The experienced worker.* Retrieved on April 4, 2005, from **www.yorkregion-vcrc.com/fortyfive_plus.htm**

- provides career research resources, including a compilation of the results from several studies, for students and other residents of York Region
- links to a variety of job matching sites

Human Resources and Skills Development Canada[*]. *Training & Careers*. Government of Canada. Retrieved on April 14, 2005, from **www.jobsetc.ca**

- the federal government's site about jobs, workers, training and careers. Click on the drop down menu "What if I'm an older worker?"

Human Resources and Skills Development Canada. *Labour Program: Aging workforce section*. Government of Canada. Retrieved on June 3, 2005, from **www110.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/worklife/aging-workforce-en.cfm**

- research documents and links related to an aging workforce

Human Resources and Skills Development Canada. *Labour Program. Work-life balance in Canadian workplaces: Bibliography*. Government of Canada. Retrieved on June 3, 2005, from **www110.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/worklife/bibliography.cfm**

- has reports and articles on work-life balance and the aging workforce

National Advisory Council on Aging. Retrieved on May 31, 2005, from **www.naca.ca**

- an advisory body to the federal Minister of Health on all matters relating to the aging population as well as on the quality of life of Canada's seniors

Public Health Agency of Canada. *Aging and seniors*. Retrieved on May 31, 2005, from **www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/seniors-aines**

- has links and publications for and about seniors

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[*] This federal government department name underwent a change in February 2006. The new department joins two former ministries, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada and Social Development Canada. Both ministry websites were still functioning under their former titles at the time of publication.

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CHAPTER 6

Persons Belonging to Sexual Minorities

WHATWORKS:
Career–building Strategies for People From Diverse Groups

Persons Belonging to Sexual Minorities

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Persons Belonging to Sexual Minorities

What do I wish I would have known when I first started working with persons belonging to sexual minorities?

"I wish I would have known to just trust the process. That people are people and that I can be comfortable being myself and using my skills. I can't be everything to everyone, but I can help clients find other resources if I don't know the answer. I have found that taking part in workshops to gain more information on working with persons belonging to sexual minorities has been really helpful. Becoming aware of my values and beliefs has been an important part of feeling comfortable. When we work with clients in a holistic manner, many of the counselling skills we use are the same regardless of the issues that clients bring."

Marcia Taylor
Lethbridge Community College

Introduction

Over the past decade, there has been a growing awareness that persons belonging to sexual minorities experience discrimination and stereotyping in the workplace. For the purpose of this resource, the descriptor, 'persons belonging to sexual minorities', will include gay men, lesbian women, bisexual persons and transgendered persons. The abbreviation GLBT is used throughout this chapter and refers to individuals in these populations.

"The past decade [as of 2003] has witnessed… significant advance in…[the] literature, namely attention to the vocational behaviour of lesbian, gay male and bisexual male and female (LGB) persons. This new development is a response to the historical ignorance regarding sexual orientation and the heterosexual assumptions in career theories and research…A recent political trend in society at large, as well as in professional organizations, is the inclusion of transgendered people in the LGB [lesbian, gay, bisexual] movement."[1]

Statistics

Given the nature of this population and the fact that they have experienced considerable discrimination, individuals in this population are much less likely to self-report, resulting in statistics that may not accurately represent actual numbers.

"CCHS Cycle 2.1 [Canadian Community Health Survey, completed between January and December, 2003] is the first Statistics Canada survey to include a question on sexual orientation. This information is needed to understand differences in health-related issues between the homosexual (gay or lesbian), bisexual and heterosexual populations...

- Among Canadians aged 18 to 59, 1.0% reported that they consider themselves to be homosexual and 0.7% considered themselves bisexual.
- About 1.3% of men considered themselves homosexual, about twice the proportion of 0.7% among women. However, 0.9% of women reported being bisexual, slightly higher than the proportion of 0.6% among men."[2]

An accepted estimate, and quite likely more accurate figure, reflects GLBT individuals at just under 10 per cent of the general population.[3]

Same-sex relationships

For the first time, the 2001 Census included a question about same-sex relationships and found the following results:

- "The results show a total of 34,200 same-sex common-law couples reporting their relationships, representing 0.5% of couples who reported.
- About 15% of lesbian couples and 3% of gay male couples reported raising children." [4]

These figures are likely to under-represent the true numbers of those living in same-sex relationships but are viewed as a first step in establishing a national profile of the lesbian, gay and bisexual communities of Canada.[5]

General Characteristics

Definitions

As Alderson reminds us, "It is important that counsellors be aware of terminology that is considered respectful and reflective of the particular sexual minority included by the term."[6]

Sexual orientation

- "affection and sexual attraction for people of the same or opposite sex".[7]

Sexual minorities

- "[i]ndividuals who have a gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, transsexual, or queer identity.[8]

Queer

- "[t]hose people who have adopted 'an identity that celebrates differences within a wider picture of sexual and social diversity'."[9] The term "queer individuals" can include lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered individuals, as well as heterosexual allies supporting liberation efforts for sexual minorities.
- It is important to remember that the term "queer" was once a discriminatory term used with reference to gay men, although some people from sexual minorities have reclaimed it with a more positive connotation. Because of its negative past, it is suggested that counsellors avoid using the term "queer" unless clients use it first with reference to themselves.[10]

Gay

- A male individual who is emotionally and sexually attracted to members of the same sex. It is generally acceptable to use either term: "gay" or "gay man."[11]
- The term "gay" is frequently used as a synonym for homosexual; some lesbian women identify themselves as gay.

Lesbian

- A female individual who is emotionally and sexually attracted to members of the same sex.[12] It is generally acceptable to use either terms: lesbian or lesbian woman.

Bisexual

- An individual who may be emotionally and sexually attracted to members of either sex. The degree of attraction may not be the same for both sexes and may vary over time.[13]

Transgendered

- Individuals who "question the gender identity they were biologically assigned at birth and reject it either partially or completely. The term *transgendered* may refer to cross-dressers, transsexuals, or intersexed persons. (This latter term is now used instead of the word *hermaphrodite*.)"[14] "Intersex is a general term used for a variety of conditions in which a person is born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy that doesn't seem to fit the typical definitions of female or male."[15]

Transsexual

- Individuals who "desire to permanently live as the opposite sex from their birth sex… [These individuals] may choose to have sex reassignment surgery."[16]

Homophobia

- "Fear or misunderstanding of homosexuality and GLBT people, which is often expressed by offensive, discriminatory, and violent actions. The term 'internalized homophobia' describes a GLBT person's fear, denial, or refusal of their own sexual orientation."[17]

Homonegativity

- "A more specific and modern version of the term, homophobia. It refers to having negative views toward gay individuals without implying…(fear) of them."[18]

Heterosexism

- Refers to the assumption that all people are heterosexual and all activities are seen from a heterosexual point of view. This "ideology… excludes reference to gay people, effectively making them invisible."[19]

Closeted

- Describes individuals who have not disclosed their sexual identity to other people.[20]

Covering[21]

- Refers to attempting to appear to be a heterosexual but not faking heterosexuality

Passing

- Refers to individuals not disclosing their sexual identity to ensure others believe they are heterosexual.[22]

Out

- Describes the degree to which individuals disclose their sexual identity to others.
- Implicitly out: being honest about life and activities and not using GLB labels
- Explicitly out: being open about sexual identity, including telling other people. [23]

Discrimination

Movement towards equality

Although the gay and lesbian population has traditionally been marginalized, significant events are increasing their equality. The recent (2005) passage of the federal Bill C-38, precursor to the *Civil Marriage Act*,[24] which includes same-sex couples in the definition of civil marriage, is one of the last pieces of the legal framework necessary to guarantee full equality.

A history of discrimination

"According to the 2002 Public Service Employee Survey, five percent of respondents (about 700 federal government employees) indicated that they had been victims of discrimination or harassment at work because of their sexual orientation."[25]

In a 2001 survey on the well-being of GLBT persons in the Ottawa region, respondents reported the following information:

- 38 per cent had suffered more than three incidents involving verbal abuse in their lives
- 13 per cent had been threatened with violence
- 9 per cent had been victims of crime.[26]

Constitutional guarantees

The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms states "Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability." [27]

In 1996, the federal government passed Bill C-33, adding sexual orientation to the list of prohibited grounds of discrimination under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms."[28]

In Alberta, the *Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act* recognizes that "all persons are equal in dignity, rights and responsibilities without regard to [the protected grounds of] race, religious beliefs, colour, gender, physical disability, mental disability, age, ancestry, place of origin, marital status, source of income or family status.' While not stated explicitly in the *Act*, the Government of Alberta agreed to 'read in' sexual orientation as an additional protected ground, effective April 2, 1998."[29]

Although protection from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation is guaranteed in the federal Charter of Rights and at the provincial level, that guarantee has not always held true for persons belonging to sexual minorities, either in the workplace or in society.

"The outright prejudice and discrimination against gays [and lesbians] has a long history…and its influence today remains pervasive….Despite the Canadian ideal of respecting diversity, polls still indicate that many Canadians view gay individuals negatively….Twenty percent of gay men have been physically assaulted…and the vast majority have experienced verbal harassment…."[30] Similarly in the United States, "reported incidents of employment discrimination as well as hate crimes against lesbians have increased over the past 5 years [since 2000]."[31]

Discrimination against transgendered persons is also common. Keith Norton, former Chief Commissioner of the Ontario Human Rights Commission, has stated, "…Discrimination against transgendered persons is systemic. Human rights violations are both varied and widespread across geographic and class boundaries…Transgendered persons have been an especially marginalized group."[32]

> *"The promotion of equality entails the promotion of a society in which all are secure in the knowledge that they are recognized at law as human beings equally deserving of concern, respect and consideration."*
>
> J. McIntyre[33]

Professional associations

Both the Canadian Counselling Association and the Canadian Psychological Association "have charged their members with respecting diversity, including diversity based on sexual minorities (Canadian Psychological Association 2000; Sheppard, Schulz, and McMahon, 1999)."[34]

The Respect for Persons section of the Code of Ethics identified by the Canadian Standards and Guidelines for Career Development states "[c]areer development practitioners respect and stand up for the individual rights and personal dignity of all clients. Career development practitioners do not condone or engage in sexual harassment. Career development practitioners promote equality of opportunity and provide non-discriminatory service…"[35]

The Career Development Association of Alberta's Code of Ethics, in referring to impartiality, outlines that "Career development professionals will be aware of their personal values and issues, and will strive to remain impartial when assisting clients in a career decision making or problem solving process. They will strive to avoid all types of stereotyping and discrimination."[36]

Although professional counselling associations identify equal treatment for all clients as ethically correct for their members, many counsellors continue to demonstrate subtle or more obvious signs of discrimination against GLBT clients. Such discrimination may take the form of avoiding topics that are uncomfortable for the counsellor, minimizing the importance of sexual orientation related to issues and so on.[37]

Discrimination in the workplace

Studies completed regarding discrimination against GLB in the workplace suggest that discrimination is pervasive. "From 25 to 60 per cent of respondents in three studies…reported experiencing discrimination and…these figures were in agreement with other data summarized by previous authors."[38]

Distinctions are made between formal and informal discrimination in the workplace:[39]

- formal: discriminatory decisions regarding conditions of employment (for example, in hiring, wages, same sex partner benefits, wages, etc.)
- informal: hostility demonstrated in the workplace environment or climate, for example, verbal harassment, damage of personal property, disrespect, etc.

A step in the right direction

Many organizations now have written policies that are meant to protect GLBT persons. Such policies as same-sex partner benefits, leave for family-related events and so on are positive steps in acknowledging and valuing GLBT persons in the workplace.

In some cases where policies formally protect GLBT individuals, discrimination and prejudice has gone underground and become no less damaging but slightly more subtle.[40]

Emotional health

Support

Frequently when GLB individuals come out to their families and/or peers, temporary conflicts arise, leaving GLB individuals with very little support. When this event coincides with the timing of important career decisions for GLB individuals, it may influence their self-esteem, self-efficacy and general well-being and, in turn, negatively impact their career decision-making process.[41]

Emotional health, substance use and suicide

GLBT persons are likely to be at higher risk than the general population for substance abuse and self-harm, including suicide. Both males and females who reported a same-sex attraction are over-represented in statistics regarding substance misuse, suicidal behaviour and depressed mood compared with their counterparts who reported opposite-sex attraction only.[42]

Sexual identity formation model

A number of models related to the formation of sexual identity have been proposed. A widely accepted model is that developed by Cass. Alderson provides a summary of this model as follows:[43]

"Cass (1979) first developed her theory of sexual identity formation using interpersonal congruency theory as its foundation. She later modified her theory to incorporate a social constructionist perspective (Cass, 1996). Her model includes the following six stages:

1. Identity Confusion – Increased awareness of same-sex or bisexual thoughts, feelings or behaviours. This creates confusion because these thoughts, feelings or behaviours do not fit into a heterosexual mould.

2. Identity Comparison – Begin exploring the gay world, seeking out further information and contact with GLB people.
3. Identity Tolerance – Increased contact with GLB individuals, but still mostly identifying as heterosexual.
4. Identity Acceptance – Conflict begins to surface with non-GLB individuals while simultaneously developing increased comfort with the idea of being GLB. Most people at this stage continue to use *passing* [deceiving others into believing they are heterosexual[44]] as a management strategy.
5. Identity Pride – Strong pride in the GLB community. Possible immersion within the GLB culture with concomitant anger and isolation from heterosexuals.
6. Identity Synthesis – Acceptance of gay culture and the heterosexual community."[45]

"This model differs from most others in its rejection of the commonly held assumption that people perceive the acquisition of a homosexual identity in a negative light. Within each stage, several different paths of development are proposed. Where the other models were applied to either male or female homosexuals, this model is intended to explain the identity formation process for both groups."[46]

> *"Lesbian and gay sexual identity development can be defined as the process of changing one's current dominant heterosexual cultural beliefs, values, attitudes, behaviours and identification to those of a minority lesbian or gay culture and identification. (Prince, 1995). Furthermore, it is the process by which a person overcomes or manages internalized and externalized homophobia and heterosexism, resulting in the development of a positive sense of self as lesbian or gay."*
> James M. Croteau et al.[47]

"There is growing appreciation that sexual identity is only part of one's total identity. As is true of stage models in general, the underlying assumption is that people must pass through the stages in a linear fashion, with some back and forth movement expected. Where LGB clients are at developmentally will significantly affect the outcome and process of career counselling."[48]

Coming out and academic performance

University students reported that the process of coming out had an impact on their academic performance. "This happened in several different ways. Most began to come out to others when they left home to attend university. The stress of working through the issue of sexual orientation, combined with the fears associated with coming out, resulted in inattention to academic work. This is consistent with what other researchers have found; those who come out as young adults often report feeling like they are having a second adolescence, which can also disrupt their attention to academic pursuits. Other participants in our study embraced gay culture and activism so fervently that little energy was left for academic work. A number of participants reported losing a year out of their studies, performing poorly as they were working through sexual identity issues or re-balancing their social and political involvements. Conversely, a few indicated that they work harder academically, achieving even better grades, as a protection against potential discrimination if their sexual identity were known to their professors."[49]

Relationship of sexual identity development to career development

Certainly, there is a relationship between to the stage of sexual identity development and the career development process. It is difficult for clients to focus on career-related matters when clients are pre-occupied with issues related to sexual identity development. In fact, Croteau et al. declares that "this literature (literature reviewed by Croteau et al.) is unanimous in admonishing career practitioners to recognize that sexual identity development influences career development for LGB clients."[50]

House discusses the relationship of sexual identity development to career development of lesbian women. She cites extensive evidence in the literature that shows sexual identity development and career development are related and suggests that career development for such individuals can be delayed.[51]

Societal messages, sexual identity and occupational choice

Examination of the relationship among societal messages, sexual identity and occupational choice has been minimal. The major focus of work done to date has related to lesbian and gay individuals. In some occupational areas, it appears that opportunity is influenced by stereotypes based on prejudice that limits occupational choice. For example, gay and lesbian individuals may perceive that working with children will not be acceptable.[52]

Research required

Bisexual individuals

Bisexual individuals have largely been ignored in the literature. Many articles include the term "bisexual" in their title and fail to make reference to it. Frequently, the limited discussion related to bisexual individuals focuses on how the theory being discussed or the research completed does not apply to these individuals, rather than how it might apply.[53]

Bisexual individuals tend to suffer discrimination within both the heterosexual and homosexual communities.[54] Many people do not believe that bisexual is a valid orientation; many believe that bisexuals are simply confused about their orientation and that identifying as bisexual is a step in the process of identifying as a gay or lesbian individual. This is not the case and it is important to recognize bisexual as a valid orientation.

Transgendered individuals

There is very little information regarding transgendered individuals in career development literature. As a result, there is no theoretical guidance for working with this group. It is speculated that transgendered individuals may have many issues in common with GLB individuals (for example, identity development, coming out, oppression, discrimination). At the same time, they face their own unique issues, such as the impact of cross-dressing and the impact of sex change procedures on employment, legal issues regarding their status as male or female and a variety of occupational choice and adjustment issues.[55]

Responding to Challenges: Strategies and Practices

While the same basic career counselling skills apply to working with clients belonging to sexual minorities as to any other clients, there are also some considerations that will help ensure the counselling process is most effective.

Multicultural counselling

A common suggestion in the literature is to approach career counselling for persons belonging to sexual minorities by applying the general concepts of effective multicultural counselling. A similar suggestion is made for counsellors focusing on non-career-related counselling and therapy.[56] The rationale for applying multicultural counselling approaches with GLBT clients is that these clients represent a minority relative to the dominant heterosexual population. Thus, they are likely to subscribe to their own "minority culture" beliefs and attitudes. This approach has been successfully adopted in career counselling with various groups of clients representing minorities. An example is the federal government Employment Equity Career Counselling program that uses such a career counselling approach with four designated equity groups: women, Aboriginal people, persons with disabilities and members of visible minorities.[57]

Multicultural counselling focuses on competence in the following dimensions:[58]

- beliefs
- knowledge
- skills.

Beliefs

Culturally skilled counsellors:[59]

- actively examine their own assumptions regarding human behaviour, values, biases, preconceived notions, personal limitations, etc.
- become aware of and understand their own world view
- understand how their cultural experiences relate to their beliefs and attitudes and impact on their interactions with clients.

Knowledge

- actively attempt to understand the world view of culturally different clients without negative judgments
- respect and appreciate the world views of culturally different clients
- accept client world views as a legitimate perspective.

Skills

- actively develop and practice appropriate, relevant and sensitive intervention strategies and skills
- acknowledge the cultural values and life experiences of clients and incorporate them into the counselling process, as appropriate.

> *"Living in communities that routinely discriminate against gay men and lesbian women makes it difficult if not virtually impossible to avoid internalizing negative stereotypes or attitudes about this sexual minority culture. Because misinformation or misunderstanding will quickly be evident to sexual minority clients, and may cause them to seek help elsewhere or not to get help at all, counsellors must be familiar with gay and lesbian culture so they are credible and congruent in their attitudes."*[60]
>
> Mark Pope, Author

Counsellor self-awareness

As suggested in the multicultural counselling section of this chapter, an important place for counsellors to start is with themselves. It is critical that counsellors take time to reflect, particularly on their beliefs related to GLBT persons. Alderson provides a number of questions that may help counsellors explore their own attitudes and beliefs regarding GLB persons. Some of these questions apply equally to beliefs regarding transgendered persons, and counsellors may wish to reflect on their responses considering those individuals, as appropriate:

1. "Would you continue to seek the services of a physician or dentist who was openly GLB?
2. How would you feel if your son or daughter announced that he or she was GLB?
3. How would you feel about sharing a hotel room with a GLB person of your gender?
4. Would you allow yourself to become close friends with someone who is GLB?
5. Would you invite open GLB individuals to your wedding and encourage them to dance with their same-sex partners?
6. Do you believe that gay people are equal to heterosexual individuals in every respect?
7. If you were GLB, or are GLB, how open would you feel (or do you feel) about it where you live and where you work?"[61]

"If you feel some hesitancy or reluctance in answering the first six questions, you have some work to do before you are ready to work effectively with GLB individuals. Largely out of necessity, GLBs become very sensitive to the views that others hold of them. Often this is communicated very subtly, and it is this subtleness that GLBs become adept at discerning."[62]

Knowledge

There is evidence of heterosexist biases commonly demonstrated in counselling practice with persons belonging to sexual minorities. Some of this bias is a result of lack of information regarding GLB clients, their issues, lifestyles and resources.[63]

There are many ways to gain knowledge about GLBT persons and the issues they may face. Following are some suggestions provided by practitioners in the field:[64]

- Read books, journal articles and information on websites.
- Attend workshops or training events.
- Talk to career counsellors who are experienced in the field.
- Be open to GLBT clients and learn from them.
- Seek out and learn about resources in the community, for example, gay dances, help centres.
- Think of GLBT people that are in your circle. Reflect on:

- What are they like?
- What is their experience?
- How are they dealt with?

Skills
"If counsellors have the attitudes (accepting, non-judgemental, open) and the knowledge about sexual minorities, that is the main thing. The counselling skills are not that different from any other client group."[65]

Creating a GLBT-affirming environment

GLBT-friendly offices and centres
It is important to create an environment that is welcoming to GLBT clients. Some suggestions follow:[66]

- Display GLB-affirmative artwork, pamphlets and books.
- Display a small rainbow flag or an inverted pink triangle to signal a GLB-friendly environment.
- Provide inclusive written language in all paperwork and forms.
- Use language inclusive of same-sex relationships in speech. Do not assume heterosexuality.
- Be familiar with GLB-specific career resources and referrals.

While these suggestions are made with regard to GLB individuals, counsellors are encouraged to adapt them and to ensure that an environment inclusive of transgendered individuals is also established.

GLBT-friendly services
The following suggestions are provided for counselling centres wanting to offer inclusive services to GLBT clients:[67]

- Develop partnerships with GLBT groups in the community.
- Recruit GLBT contacts who can act as resources to clients.
- Develop a section on the centre website to include links to sites that discuss issues related to career building and sexual orientation.
- Offer information sessions and panel discussions including GLBT individuals.
- Offer professional development sessions encouraging counsellors to discuss their understanding of belonging to sexual minorities and to examine their attitudes and beliefs and how these might affect their counselling interactions with GBLT clients.
- Provide counsellors with books, articles and other resources with information regarding GLBT issues.

> *"Counsellors working with sexual minorities must have an attitude that they (GLBT clients) are not less than; they truly cannot believe that these clients are less than any other person. Counsellors should ask themselves, 'If my son or daughter turned out to be gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgendered, would I see them as less than anyone else'?"*
>
> Kevin Alderson
> University of Calgary

Tips for counsellors

The following tips for counsellors working with GLBT clients are provided by current practitioners:[68]

- Reflect on your own experiences with GLBT persons and try to understand more of their experience.
- Re-examine your own beliefs and values and reflect on how they may affect your counselling process with GLBT persons.
- Accept that counsellors don't have all the answers. Let clients know that and be open to learning from them.
- Review confidentiality and reassure clients your counselling conversation is between you and them. Building trust is key.
- Refer GLBT clients if you have beliefs and values that might get in the way of working with them effectively and let them know why you are referring them.
- Refer clients who are exploring their own sexuality if you don't have a background and expertise in that area. It is important not to minimize the issue or to make it known that you have a preference regarding their sexual orientation.
- Reassure clients that you are referring. Ensure they understand the reason you are referring them is to make certain they receive help from someone who has the appropriate background.

Some additional tips include:[69]

- Explore clients' support systems. Many GLBT clients live in isolation without support from their families or friends.
- Be inclusive in speech (e.g. partner, dating someone, etc.).
- Use proper terms and language with GLBT clients. Some lesbian women take offence at being called gay. Do not use terms historically targeted for discrimination.
- Be sensitive to the fact that individuals belonging to sexual minorities are likely to be at different stages of their sexual identity formation.
- Don't make assumptions across all four groups (GLBT). Each group has distinguishing features.
- Learn from clients—they can teach us a wealth of information. Remember, what they tell us is about them and does not likely represent all GLBT persons.
- Read and learn about sexual minorities. Knowledge is so important.

> *"It is important to let them [GLBT clients] know right up front that sexual orientation is only one part, although an important part, of who they are and that this is a safe place to talk about it. Seeking help is hard enough for anybody and, in my experience, most people take a long and winding road before going to a counsellor. Often, they feel that they have no more options and the problem may have snowballed so that they are not feeling hopeful or comfortable. I don't always know if I can help them, but I can listen and not judge."*
>
> Marcia Taylor
>
> Lethbridge Community College

Role models

GLBT clients may benefit from connecting with other GLBT individuals who are willing to act as mentors or to provide occupational information or other lifestyle information regarding their experience of being "out" at work, etc. Counsellors can help by actively seeking out such role models willing to act as resources for persons belonging to sexual minorities.[70]

The increasing number of public figures who openly are members of the GLBT community provide outstanding role models for gay and lesbian individuals. Examples of prominent individuals in the political, cultural and athletic arenas abound (e.g. Olympic athletes, members of parliament, award-winning artists) and counsellors are encouraged to bring the names of potentially meaningful role models to the attention of GLBT clients.

Testing biases

Counsellors are encouraged to consider carefully any testing instruments they may be inclined to use with clients belonging to sexual minorities. A consensus in the literature examining the use of career assessment instruments with GLBT clients is that the results of tests may not be reliable and/or valid.[71]

Helping clients explore values and beliefs

Clarifying stereotypes that limit occupational choice

Values and beliefs held by people have a major impact on their occupational choices and this is particularly significant for clients belonging to sexual minorities. As discussed previously, it appears that perceived opportunity in some occupational areas is influenced by stereotypes, based on prejudice, that limit occupational choice. The experience of discrimination, both past and anticipated, may also be a factor in considering various occupational sectors. Given this, counsellors have an important role to play in facilitating client exploration and awareness of their values and beliefs. There are a variety of strategies that might be implemented with clients to facilitate this process.

While the following examples were identified to help clients clarify beliefs about gender and related stereotypes, they also reflect effective counselling approaches for all clients:[72]

- guided self-exploration regarding what is important in their work (and non-work) roles
- lifelines, life stories, future autobiographies, guided fantasies to anticipate and contrast possible futures
- narratives to explore embedded meanings
- open questions to prompt the prioritization of values.

Building on strength

In general, it will be important for counsellors to facilitate client exploration of their preferred future and related work roles and to ensure that clients are identifying and building on their strengths rather than limiting their choices with historical stereotypes.

The ideal work environment

"A GLBT employee was asked to describe his idea of the best possible work environment. His answer: 'The ideal work environment for GLBT persons is the ideal environment for all employees. A place where respect for diversity is not just a nice-sounding motto, but a value that is put into practice on a daily basis. A place where managers and employees all refuse to accept intolerance'."[73]

Canadian Heritage and Parks Canada publication

Focusing on Employment

Work environments

Work environments vary in terms of the level of tolerance they extend to GLBT individuals. Heterosexism and discrimination are giving way to acceptance of diversity in some organizations. The Canadian Heritage and Parks Canada publication, *Out and About: Towards a better understanding of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered persons in the workplace*, provides information to employees and is an example of such acceptance.[74] Many organizations have programs that support and promote diversity issues both in the workplace and in the community. An example is a nationwide initiative launched in Britain and sponsored by IBM. The initiative, Education for All, is aimed at tackling homophobia and homophobic bullying in schools.[75]

Some organizations intentionally recruit GLBT employees, participating in gay job fairs and conferences. At one such event in 2004, over twenty companies participated, including such large organizations as Ford Motor Company, Sun Microsystems, Citigroup and Morgan Stanley. One gay-oriented work search site has postings from more than 1,100 companies, including MicroSoft and Capital One Financial. Another strategy used is to connect with gay talent through employee referrals. Many organizations do this through company-sanctioned GLBT resource groups established to advise them on gay workplace issues. About one half of the companies in the Fortune 500 are reported to have such groups.[76]

Many unions recognize the need to support their members who are GLBT. The Canadian Auto Workers' Union (CAW) has a PRIDE policy statement declaring it is demanding equality in the workplace and in the union for its gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered members.[77] The United Steelworkers also supports diversity and has sub-committees representing various diverse groups, including a group representing gay and lesbian issues.[78]

Many businesses recognize the GBLT community as representing a considerable market opportunity and promote themselves as "gay-friendly" businesses by advertising on GLBT websites and listing in the Pink Pages (a gay and lesbian directory).

Helping clients with work search strategies

Many decisions related to work search strategies may be influenced by the degree to which clients choose to be out. Related to the decision of coming out is the degree to which clients anticipate discrimination in specific workplaces and during the work search process. Counsellors can assist GLBT clients by helping them think through their work search strategies, make informed decisions, anticipate possible consequences and plan accordingly. Various aspects of the work search process, with some related considerations for GLBT clients, follow.

Research organizations

Clients may want to research GLBT-friendly specific work environments. Counsellors can ask clients to consider the following:[79]

- Research specific organizations rather than making assumptions about an entire industry.
- Check GLBT-friendly business listings to see whether the organization is represented.
- Check the organization's website for evidence of official policies and resources and any GLBT employee groups.
- Check (anonymously, if preferred) with the HR department regarding same-sex benefits, support groups for GLBT, etc.
- Contact the employee group (anonymously, if preferred) for information about the organizational climate.
- Check their networks for employees or friends of employees of the organization who may be willing to provide further information.

Résumé writing

Counsellors can help GLBT clients build résumés that reflect their strengths and accomplishments. They can also help clients consider how to include relevant skills and accomplishments built through leadership and/or participation in GLBT organizations. Have clients consider the following:[80]

- Target résumés for specific work opportunities and highlight skills and achievements that are relevant to the position.
- Weigh the pros and cons of including information that may reflect sexual orientation.

Emphasize accomplishments and skills developed through participation and/or leadership of any GLBT organizational activities (rather than the organizational affiliation).

Interview strategies

As for all clients, preparation for interviews is critical. GLBT clients may benefit from considering the following:[81]

- Research the organization.
- Weigh the pros and cons of coming out during the interview process.
- Be prepared to speak to all skills and accomplishments outlined in your résumé, including any developed through participation and/or leadership in GLBT organizations.

A new direction for work search

Some GLBT individuals may want to restrict their work search to GLBT-friendly organizations. This approach may be more difficult for individuals living in small centres who are unable to relocate. For those in larger centres, however, this option may be preferred. Resources featuring GLBT-friendly organizations and advice are available.[82] Counsellors are encouraged to become aware of such resources and to assist clients with referrals, as appropriate. Central to pursuing this option for GLBT clients is the resulting freedom to be themselves without having to make ongoing decisions about disclosing their sexual orientation or identity during their work search or in their workplace.

> *"When you believe it's possible to achieve professional success based on your personal identity, you acknowledge that you are worthy of success. Who we are as human beings is the most important career asset we possess and sexual orientation is part of our identity."*
>
> Kirk Snyder, Author[83]

Sexual identity management

Sexual identity management for GLBT persons involves the ongoing process of deciding when and with whom they will be open regarding their sexual identity. "Existing research indicates that concerns about past, present and anticipated discrimination is a key factor in identity management decision. Griffin…points to the dynamic tension between fear of discrimination and personal integrity in making decisions about identity management in the workplace."[84]

Disclosure and non-disclosure in the workplace

Whether to be out or not in the workplace is clearly a client decision. Frequently, the decision is dependent on what stage individuals are at regarding their sexual identity development. A range of degrees of disclosure is reviewed again in the following information:[85]

- passing: deceiving others into thinking they are heterosexual
- covering: attempting to appear to be a heterosexual but not faking heterosexuality
- implicitly out: being honest about life and activities and not using GLB labels
- explicitly out: being open about sexual identity, including telling other people.

Counsellors can help clients explore the consequences of disclosing or not disclosing. Such a decision is highly personal and individual clients will weigh the same factors differently as they explore possible solutions. The following information may be helpful:

- Some GLBT persons prefer to be out at work as it relieves the stress of maintaining a heterosexual facade and allows GLBT persons to speak of their families and social activities or inviting co-workers to their home.[86]
- Clients may face increased discrimination after disclosing.[87]
- Disclosure may be related to higher job satisfaction.[88]
- Disclosure for lesbian women may result in changed relationships at work, some improved, some less supportive.[89]

Transgendered individuals at work

Transgendered individuals face many challenges with employers and colleagues; in particular, they are often subject to harsh judgments. They may be isolated from friends and family.[90] Counsellors can play an important role in providing assistance to these individuals as they develop strategies to deal with these work and life issues.

In Conclusion

Counsellors are encouraged to be open to, and continue learning about, persons belonging to sexual minorities. As is the case with all clients, acceptance, support and a listening ear will provide a base to explore and clarify their issues as well as celebrate their achievements. "Counsellors with an 'open heart' can be instrumental not only in helping these individuals, but also in teaching others about them and the issues that they face."[91]

Websites and Resource Organizations

Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission. *Diversity and Equality*. Retrieved June 5, 2005, from **www.albertahumanrights.ab.ca/diversity**

- provides information sheet on *Alberta's Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act*

Contact Point. Gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered resources. Retrieved June 10, 2005, from **www.contactpoint.ca/article.pl?sid=04/01/20/1653208**

- listing of resources for GLBT individuals, including campus organizations across Canada, professional organizations, work-related articles, networking resources and more

Egale Canada. Retrieved June 17, 2005, from **www.egale.ca/index.asp?lang=E**

- a national organization that advances equality and justice for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans-identified people and their families across Canada

Gaymentor.com. Retrieved June 21, 2005, from **www.myownmentor.com/gaymentor.com/PAGES-HTML/HOMEPAGE-MainFrame.html**

- a small business, professional and student mentoring website offering resources to the gay and lesbian community

Gaywork.com. Retrieved June 20, 2005, from **www.gaywork.com**

- a job forum in partnership with Monster for job seekers and gay friendly employers
- offers articles, editorials and recourses for GLBT job seekers and job postings in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Australia and Mexico

Human Rights Campaign. Retrieved June 21, 2005, from **www.hrc.org**

- an American organization working for GLBT equal rights
- provides publications and resources on GLBT issues in the workplace, including a searchable database of private sector company policies and government department policies relating to GLBT issues

ProGayJobs. Retrieved June 16, 2005, from **www.progayjobs.com**

- an e-recruitment firm for gays and lesbians and companies that support diversity and an open environment for gay and lesbian employees

Statistics Canada. Retrieved May 13, 2005, from **www.statcan.ca**

- Canada's central statistical agency with information on population and other aspects of life in Canada

The Gay Financial Network. Retrieved June 18, 2005 from **www.gfn.com**

- an American organization with GLBT career articles, financial planning resources
- founder of the GFN Business Network, an organization providing networking opportunities for GLBT-owned or GLBT-friendly companies

Transgender at Work. Retrieved June16, 2005, from **www.tgender.net/taw**

- provides resources for transgendered workers and their employers, including resources for writing an HR policy with supportive gender transition guidelines

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Snyder, K. (2005). *Achieving success as yourself.* The Gay Financial Network: Story Archive. Retrieved June 18, 2005, from **www.gfn.com**

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CHAPTER 7

Persons With Developmental Disabilities

WHATWORKS?

Career–building Strategies for People From Diverse Groups

Persons With Developmental Disabilities

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Persons With Developmental Disabilities

What do I wish I would have known when I started working with persons with developmental disabilities?

"In general, in my education and experience, I was led to believe that the hopes, dreams and aspirations of persons with developmental disabilities were different from everyone else...and that's not true. We all want to have family involvement, to have loved ones in our lives, to have jobs and careers. I had to really look and think about things differently to 'get' this."

Tim Weinkauf
Persons with Developmental Disabilities
Alberta Provincial Board

Introduction

Developmental disability is defined by the Persons with Developmental Disabilities (PDD) Alberta Provincial Board as "a state of functioning that begins in childhood and is characterized by significant limitations in both intellectual capacity and adaptive skills."[1] In addition, the Board uses the following three criteria to make the determination of developmental disability for PDD program purposes:

- significantly below average intellectual capacity
- onset prior to age 18
- related limitations in two or more of the following adaptive skills areas:
  - communication
  - home living
  - community use
  - health and leisure
  - self-care
  - social skills
  - self-direction
  - functional academics
  - work.[2]

Statistics

Difficulties in developing a precise functional definition of developmental disabilities and in collecting data result in an estimate of the developmentally disabled adult population at between 1 and 3 per cent of the general adult population.[3] Some additional information based on Alberta statistics include:

- 11,550 people reported having a developmental disability in 2001.[4]
- Approximately 9,100 Albertans with a developmental disability access government funding for personal supports through PDD[5]
- Approximately 33 per cent of the people supported through PDD are in the labour market[6]
- Approximately 58 per cent of the total number of persons with developmental disabilities in the labour market are employed.[7]

A real life in a real world

The trend towards inclusion has resulted in the movement of persons with developmental disabilities away from sheltered living and working environments to inclusion in the community. This movement is supported by government policy, including provision of funding and resources. "Community inclusion means having appropriate supports available to make choices possible; and...actively including developmentally disabled individuals in the community where they can make a contribution and be respected for their contribution."[8] "Inclusion means everyone is included in everything. No one is left out."[9] When this is the case, persons with developmental disabilities can, in the words of James McKelvey, enjoy a "real life in the real world."[10]

Since school systems expanded their special education services in the 1970s, young people with developmental disabilities have been graduating with expectations of their ability to take part in and contribute to working life. Inclusion reinforces the reality that these students are able to participate effectively in an integrated setting. Inclusive schooling now extends to the post-secondary level where a variety of institutions are offering programs.[11] Experience in inclusive schooling provides youth with developmental disabilities increased opportunities to build social and life management skills. These skills are extremely valuable as they enter the competitive workforce. In addition, they have the opportunity to build relationships with a cross-section of community members who may then become allies with regard to career building.

Inclusion of persons with developmental disabilities in our increasingly diverse workforce makes sound economic sense. While people with developmental disabilities, and those included in their network of relationships, represent a significant potential customer base to businesses that employ them, they also bring unique skill sets and a valuable perspective to the workplace.[12]

Persons with developmental disabilities are being given more support to overcome many barriers to employment. Government policy has changed, taking more active measures to support employment of persons with developmental disabilities while continuing to provide support such as health benefits.[13]

An important role for counsellors will be to help clients with developmental disabilities recognize and build on their strengths and fully access support available to gain work in a competitive workplace.

General Characteristics

Previously, individuals with developmental disabilities were diagnosed according to their performance on a standardized intelligence test. More recently, as reflected in the introduction, the criteria for diagnosis has been expanded to include not only sub-average performance on an individually-administered intelligence test but also "limitations in adaptive skills."[14] This definition incorporates intelligence test performance *and* the functional skill level of the individual. This approach, including consideration of adaptive skills, better serves clients because it recognizes a range of disabilities and therefore a range of various services that individual clients might require.

Persons with developmental disabilities bring a wide variety of unique skills, strengths and personal characteristics. While they can be limited in their ability to manage major life activities, McKelvey asserts these limitations can be overcome with appropriate training and support. A summary of these developmental characteristics follows:[15]

Persons with developmental disabilities:

- have limited intellectual capacity
- are slower to learn and prefer reliability and consistency in processes and activities
- have a simple, unsophisticated understanding of things (can be seen as a gift not a gap when it results in simple common sense)
- benefit most from informal training or learning through participation in real-life activities.

Boggs and Henney,[16] in a classic approach, charted the effect that a developmental disability can have on the person's major life activities. An adaptation of their table, reflecting current views in the field, appears below. This table discusses the extremes—there are many variations in degree and combination of developmental disabilities.

In general, a counselling approach that focuses primarily on the individual's gifts while addressing gaps through appropriate supports and training tends to yield more effective and meaningful strategies for career building. A key will be to involve the family and/or significant support people in the process.

Major life activity	Persons with Developmental Disabilities	
	Without support: Possible challenges	**May benefit from**
Self-care	Difficulty eating, preparing food; difficulty with hygiene	Assistance in personal care
Receptive/Expressive language	Limited or no use of voice; inability to articulate ideas; inability to understand abstract ideas	Assistance with communication
Learning	Slower to learn; inability to perform routine age-appropriate academic activities	Assistance through special attention/programs
Mobility	Impaired fine or gross motor skills	Assistance from persons or devices
Self-direction	Difficulty choosing among options	Assistance in decision-making process
Capacity for independent living	Limited ability to relate to community to satisfy personal, social and health needs	In-home support including training regarding health and safety, hygiene and daily living activities
	Difficulty managing travel to and from work/recreational outings	Assistance in learning to use natural supports in managing independent travel
Economic self-sufficiency	Difficulty in gaining employment and maintaining earnings above poverty line	Assistance in learning to use natural supports in competitive work environment

A note regarding autism spectrum disorders

The information provided in this chapter may also be helpful in working with clients with autism spectrum disorders.

"Autism spectrum disorders are lifelong neurological disorders that affect a person's development and how the brain processes information. They are characterized by challenges in communication, social interaction and learning, as well as by unusual behaviour, perceptions, interests and activities. Autism conditions are spectrum disorders, meaning that the symptoms can be present in a variety of combinations each of which can range from mild to severe."[17]

Autism usually appears during the first three years of life and affects most aspects of a person's development. The prevalence of autism appears to be increasing with the current (2005) prevalence rate of at least one in every 200 births.[18]

Responding to Challenges: Strategies and Practices

The career counselling process: Some considerations

As with other clients requiring career planning assistance, begin by gathering information about their strengths, hopes for the future, likes, dislikes and needs. Family, support workers and former teachers will be important resources for this information, particularly for clients who do not communicate in a traditional manner. Information regarding general disability-related supports, which clients will require, is important at this stage, as is addressing needs for financial support.

It may be helpful to gather information about clients by:

- interviewing clients and their family members/ group home workers
- observing clients in different environments
- reviewing records and evaluations of previous experiences
- visiting clients repeatedly and communicating with clients and their families in familiar surroundings
- offering short-term assessment and trial work experiences
- arranging on-site visits to different businesses in the community.[19]

Assessment

It is assumed that clients with developmental disabilities will have been assessed by professionals previously or, if an assessment is required, that counsellors will refer clients as appropriate. An assessment might be required to confirm whether a client has a developmental disability and/or another type of disability or condition. Because assessment or testing may be intimidating, it might be helpful to involve family and support people to minimize the client's discomfort.

Person-centred planning

"Person-centered planning is a process-oriented approach to empowering people with disability labels. It focuses on the people and their needs by putting them in charge of defining the direction for their lives, not on the systems that may or may not be available to serve them. This ultimately leads to greater inclusion as valued members of both community and society."[21]

"Person-centered planning has become a widely used tool in both education and adult programs serving individuals with developmental disabilities."[22] Holburn, Jacobson and Vietz (2000), as cited in Menchetti and Garcia,[23] identified six factors that influence the effective implementation of person-centred processes, including:

- clearly defined roles
- personal relationship with the focus person
- desire for change
- creation of a personal vision
- commitment to planning and follow-up
- flexibility of resources.

Michael Smull, a strong advocate for person-centred planning, has developed an approach called Essential Lifestyle Planning (ELP), "a guided process for learning how someone wants to live and for developing a plan to help make it happen."[24]

Assets[20]

Adults with developmental disabilities often bring a set of assets to the counselling process, which could increase the likelihood of success:

- **Want to please—will seek out the counsellor and will respond to encouragement.**
- **Have available time—will have time for counselling and will practice problem resolutions.**
- **Use concrete conversation—will be easier to understand; deals with concrete events.**
- **Self-disclosure—will freely share own feelings and experiences.**
- **Empathy—will be sensitive to the feelings of others.**
- **Trust—will trust the directions of the counsellor.**
- **Models others—will be responsive to role-playing techniques.**

Smull also identifies a number of additional terms used to refer to the process of person-centred planning, including personal futures planning, PATH (Pre-vocational Assessment, Treatment and Habilitation), individual service design, 24-hour planning and whole life planning.[25] The Persons with Developmental Disabilities (PDD) Alberta Provincial Board uses the term "person-centred approaches to planning", and embeds this approach in policy.[26]

> *"Good plans reflect the perceptions of the focus person and those who know and care about him or her. Learning how people want to live is just the beginning, the foundation. Helping people have their own lives requires changing:*
>
> - how we think
> - how we are organized; and
> - how we act."
>
> Michael Smull and Susan Burke Harrison[27]

Some points to consider regarding person-centred planning:

- "…be 'sensibly unrealistic' in looking past what people have already been, to the more elusive, but powerfully formative question of what they might someday become…'Person centeredness' cannot be just about the person we have already seen, [sic] there must be allowances for the person that might yet be."[28]
- "Ensure the plan is truly person-centered, take time to get to know the person, her gifts, her dreams and her needs."[29]
- "Person-centered plans (must) reflect language and goals that are meaningful to the individual."[30]
- "It's a 'vision-quest' experience…get to know people and their vocational aspirations…don't discount their dreams…find ways of helping them become involved in those areas."[31]
- Avoid placing personal limits and perceptions of what people can do. Find out what attracts people to the area they are choosing and look for ways to support them in becoming involved.[32]

Generally, the research suggests that person-centred planning is related to increased autonomy in choice making for individuals participating in the process. This is particularly significant for clients with developmental disabilities who have not always been offered this right.[33]

Self-determination

While person-centred planning is seen to promote autonomy in choice making, "[m]any people assume that the presence of an intellectual disability precludes a person from becoming self-determined."[34] Wehmeyer and Garner[35] found that living in an environment that provided opportunities to make choices and to exert control in their lives was a more significant factor contributing to self-determination and autonomous functioning than intellectual capacity.

Plain language

Plain language is just that—language appropriate to the level of the reader, straightforward and without jargon. It is "clear, concise, and well-organized."[36] Use of the term "plain language" usually refers to written text. Experts in the field encourage the use of plain language, both written and verbal, when communicating with persons with developmental disabilities.[37]

Labels

"The institutional approach is full of labels."[38] Some labels are related to a diagnosis, while others are related to use of management tools with people. There may be a case for diagnosis and use of labels that allow individuals to access particular programs and/or funding. However, McKelvey[39] cautions us about the danger of "boxing a person in" by using a label. For counsellors, the reminder is to work with the person, not the label.

> *"The power of the judgement of others is far greater in the life of a person with developmental disabilities than it is in the lives of other people."*
>
> John Clements, Author[40]

Support

Kanchier outlines a number of classic counselling approaches that are particularly effective with persons with developmental disabilities. An adapted list of these follows:[41]

- Establish a warm, supportive, trusting environment and avoid anxiety-producing situations (testing conditions) and pressure.
- Provide encouragement and positive reinforcement, patience and support.
- Build recognition, praise, progress charts and special rewards into activities.
- Work frequently with clients and over a period of time.
- Provide group experiences as opportunities to practice verbal expression, explore occupational interests and discuss personal issues.
- Show pictures and visit businesses and industries to expose clients to job and workplace information and other life roles.
- Adapt or modify material as necessary and use a range of resources.
- Be creative and don't be afraid to experiment.

Inclusion

The concept of inclusion of persons with developmental disabilities, bringing with it the corresponding growth in inclusive education, inclusive employment and inclusive community living arrangements, is a relatively recent development. In fact, many persons with developmental disabilities have not had life experiences that foster a belief in themselves and in a future that includes education, work and recreation in an inclusive environment. Such people may be unprepared and may not have expected to work and have a career. Correspondingly, there may be a lack of knowledge, experience and preparation in the employment community.[42]

This issue presents a challenge to counsellors:

- to facilitate client awareness of their assets and the opportunities to use these assets through employment in the community
- to facilitate awareness in the employment community of the enormous potential in employing persons with developmental disabilities.

The following information identifies a variety of strategies and practices found to be effective in addressing some of these challenges.

Inclusive post-secondary education

Inclusive post-secondary education for persons with developmental disabilities lays the base for transition into an inclusive community and the competitive workforce.

"Today, Alberta offers more inclusive post-secondary options for adults with developmental disabilities than anywhere else in the world."[43] Inclusive post-secondary education programs provide persons with developmental disabilities the opportunity to participate in post-secondary education. Adults with a wide variety of abilities, including those who have been labelled severely, profoundly and multiply disabled, have successfully participated in these programs. The programs provide the following advantages to participants:

- means and experiences to develop career-related skills and aptitudes
- life-enriching experiences that assist in the transition into adulthood and community life
- natural pathways to gain access to experts and optimum learning environments
- practicum experiences that can lead to employment opportunities in the competitive workplace
- increased self-confidence and development of social skills
- decreased need for paid support workers.[44]

Social competence

Experience reflects that as persons with developmental disabilities become accustomed to functioning in inclusive settings they demonstrate growth in social judgment and related skills. It is anticipated that as young people with developmental disabilities who have participated in inclusive education enter the workforce, they will experience fewer difficulties related to social competence.[45]

Focusing on Employment

Persons with developmental disabilities can be found in a broad variety of employment settings, including self-employment. Competitive employment in the community setting is widely accepted as the preferred outcome for all clients, including those with developmental disabilities.

A new perspective

Traditionally, promotion of the employment of persons with developmental disabilities came from a human service model, where hiring such employees was viewed as providing a community service. An exciting new perspective—promotion of employment from a business model—is now taking hold. Inclusion of persons with developmental disabilities in our increasingly diverse workforce makes sound economic sense for employers.[46]

Businesses that employ a diverse workforce, including persons with disabilities of any type, enjoy many benefits. Some examples follow:[47]

- competitive advantage—employees and their networks represent a cross-section of potential customers
- unique perspectives and creativity brought to their workplace—skills developed in overcoming obstacles and compensating for deficits are an asset to the business
- larger human resource pool—by using new technologies and accessing employment specialists, these employees make valuable contributions to the workplace
- improved workplace culture—a diverse workplace is more interesting and rewarding
- preparation for the future—learning how to accommodate employees with disabilities now prepares businesses for accommodating aging customers with disabilities for the future.

Employer beliefs

Employers frequently lack knowledge about the abilities of persons with developmental disabilities and, therefore, often have only limited expectations of what they can achieve in the workplace. This can diminish access to jobs and may lead to underemployment. Helping employers understand the business advantage of employing persons with developmental disabilities is one strategy being used to address this challenge.[48]

Supported employment

The following excerpt provides definitions for the term "supported employment" and a number of related concepts:

Supported employment is "real work in an integrated setting with ongoing support provided by an agency with expertise in finding employment for people with disabilities."

What is real work?
Real work is work that would be done by a typical member of the workforce if it were not done by the worker with a disability. Supported employment placements are work, not 'vocational training,' 'work experience' or 'work preparation.'

Supported employees work **for pay** of at least minimum wage or the standard pay for that position.

What is an integrated work setting?
A work setting where the proportion of disabled workers is roughly equivalent to the proportion of people with disabilities in the general population.

Note: Large work crews or "enclaves," where disabled people work together on one site, are excluded from this definition.

What is ongoing support?
Ongoing support includes job-support services that are, theoretically, not time limited.

The service providing ongoing support should be committed to providing support for as long as the worker with a disability requires it in order to perform his or her work satisfactorily."[49]

The changing workplace and supported employment

Over the last decade, changes in the workplace have provided an environment for major advances in developing supported employment by mobilizing the existing resources within a business and reducing dependence on job coaches. Employers may have a growing capacity to hire and support employees with developmental disabilities within their existing personnel frameworks.

Rhodes et al.[50] suggest that inviting employer participation and responding to business needs for a reliable labour source are important ways to facilitate the expansion of supported employment. After asking companies to make accommodations to the service system when hiring a supported employee, Rhodes et al. suggest that the next step is to answer the following questions:[51]

- How can support be provided effectively to employers instead of only to employees with disabilities?
- What roles are co-workers already providing to employees with disabilities?
- What range of job accommodations can be used for employees with differing abilities?
- How do companies benefit from increasing their capacity to hire, train and supervise employees with severe disabilities?

Entry-level jobs

"As long as the person is working at a real job that needs to be done, a job that she chose from among various possibilities and that an employer is willing to pay at least minimum wage for, there's nothing demeaning about it. The most demeaning condition is to have no job at all or to be stuck in a 'pre-vocational' placement. Too often, 'pre-' means 'never'."

James McKelvey, Author[52]

Supported employment: Referrals to specialized agencies

Supported employment opportunities are typically provided through referrals to specialized community agencies. If you are counselling in an area where more than one agency exists for persons with developmental disabilities, it will be helpful to discuss the preferred agency with clients and their families or guardians. You may also want to consider supported employment services based on the following guiding principles.

Best practices in supported employment

The Alberta Association for Supported Employment has identified the following guiding principles to assist in the development and implementation of best practices in supported employment services:

- "Design all processes, strategies or philosophies to promote greater workforce inclusion, personal choice and independence for persons with disabilities.
- Do not allow processes, strategies or philosophies to interfere with building personal capacity or reducing poverty for persons with disabilities.
- Ensure that any interventions used are those that are the least intrusive, most respectful and most effective strategies available.
- Strive to maintain or improve your service standards."[53]

Some additional considerations regarding best practices in supported employment include:

- Assessment and planning reflects person-centred support, choice and self-determination.
- Career goals are fostered and facilitated within the context of the individual's lifestyle, non-work priorities, goals and commitments.[54]

A special note regarding training and follow-up supports:

- "Ideally the employer would address training as per their usual orientation plan for new employees, with the service provider consulting to increase successes and outcomes in this area. It may be necessary in some circumstances for the service provider to enter the work environment to assist with training. This intervention should be implemented in a manner that increases the new employee's connections and inclusion in the workplace—rather than segregates them from their co-workers."[55]

Types of employment

Persons with developmental disabilities frequently find employment in lower-paying, entry-level jobs. As participation in inclusive post-secondary education continues to grow and as person-centred planning approaches are implemented, the variety and level of work available for these clients will continue to expand.

Experts in the field[56] encourage counsellors to be creative and innovative in providing support to clients with developmental disabilities in pursuing their chosen fields of work.

> **About support**
>
> *"If we believe people are different, we provide support to them in a different way—a way that reinforces difference and further separates them from their co-workers. Specialized, segregated supports that continue to emphasize differences aren't what people want. There is a more natural way of supporting people by also supporting employers and co-workers to understand how they can be part of the support network in the workplace."*
>
> Tim Weinkauf
>
> Persons with Developmental Disabilities
>
> Alberta Provincial Board

For example, a client hoping to become a police officer may not be able to perform that exact job but can be supported to move forward to work in the area of security. Another person interested in being a nurse may not have the skills and knowledge to perform that job but can be supported to work in a nursing or health-care setting.

Perceived disincentives to work

Approximately half of the people with disabilities in Canada receive income from public income support systems. Such systems include income from a pension plan, a long-term disability pension or income support. While persons with disabilities who receive income from these sources may have the qualifications and the desire to work, they may fear jeopardizing their benefits if they take a full-time job. Considering that persons with disabilities often include medical costs among their basic needs, many feel this is too big a risk to take. In addition, some fear losing benefits because of the difficulty in getting benefits reinstated if the job does not last.

However, financial assistance programs (Alberta Works Income Support) in Alberta have changed. Individuals receiving financial assistance are encouraged to maximize self-sufficiency (which for some means working). Individuals who are working while receiving financial assistance may receive a supplement to their earnings (i.e. a portion of their wages may be exempt when their benefits are calculated).

Also in Alberta, people leaving financial assistance for jobs may continue to receive health benefits both for themselves and their children.

So, while loss of health benefits may still be a concern for clients, it may not be a reality. Counsellors are encouraged to become familiar with financial assistance programs and help clients to get more information about income exemptions and health coverage available to them before dismissing the idea of finding work.

Job accommodations[57]

Job accommodations are reasonable modifications, adjustments and equipment acquisitions that employers make to accommodate the needs of employees with disabilities. For clients with developmental disabilities, these may include:

- electronic spelling correction
- memory aids, such as post-it notes, cue sheets, etc.
- use of the natural design principles—visibility, feedback, usability—to create equipment that can be used without having to think about how they work
- computers that can produce synthesized speech
- large brightly coloured labels and symbols for caution, warning, emergency, etc., with instructions placed close to referred items
- timers, talking or digital, to time tasks, breaks, etc.
- talking calculators, tools, callipers, etc.
- use of facilitators, buddies, colleagues, coaches
- self-operated prompting strategies, such as pictures
- minimizing clutter
- avoiding frequent changes in duties, schedules, rearrangement of goods, etc.
- co-workers and supervisors sensitized to working with persons with developmental disabilities.

In Conclusion

Counsellors working with persons with developmental disabilities can be a great resource in assisting clients to achieve meaningful work in inclusive settings. Helping clients through the career-building process to take full advantage of supports available, such as job accommodations and appropriate financial assistance, encourages clients to build on their strengths and maximize their potential in a competitive workplace.

Websites and Resource Organizations

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- promotes fully inclusive lives for persons with developmental disabilities

Alberta Human Resources and Employment. Alberta adult health benefit. Retrieved on April 26, 2005, from **www.gov.ab.ca/hre/ahb**

- has guidelines for the Alberta adult health benefit program

American Association on Mental Retardation. Retrieved April 16, 2005, from **www.aamr.org**

- provides information and ideas for professionals working with persons with intellectual disabilities

Autism Resources. Retrieved April 19, 2005, from **www.autism-resources.com**

- links to information and resources on Autism and Asperger's Syndrome

Autism Society Canada. Retrieved May 9, 2005, from **www.autismsocietycanada.ca**

- has information and general referrals on Autism Spectrum Disorder, including links to provincial and territorial societies

Canadian Abilities Foundation. Retrieved April 19, 2005, from **www.enablelink.org**

- links to services for persons with disabilities

Canadian Association for Community Living. Retrieved April 17, 2005, from **www.cacl.ca**

- provides information on inclusive community living for persons with intellectual disabilities

Canadian Association of Independent Living Centres. Retrieved April 17, 2005, from **www.cailc.ca**

- has information and resources promoting full integration and participation of persons with disabilities into Canadian society

Job Accommodation Network. Retrieved April 19, 2005, from **www.jan.wvu.edu**

- an international information network and consulting resource for accommodating persons with disabilities in the workplace

J. P. Das Developmental Disabilities Centre, University of Alberta. Retrieved April 19, 2005, from **www.ualberta.ca/~jpdasddc/INDEX.html**

- offers information on current research, student training, publications

Persons with Developmental Disabilities (PDD) Alberta Provincial Board. Retrieved April 13, 2005, from **www.pdd.org**

- develops, implements and evaluates a provincial plan for the delivery of supports to adults with developmental disabilities
- provides links to a variety of resources and information for persons with developmental disabilities

Plain Language Resources. Retrieved May 9, 2005, from **www.plainlanguagenetwork.org/Resources**

- has web links, tutorials and articles regarding the use of plain language
- an on-line plain language tutorial available

Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities, Government of Alberta. Retrieved April 19, 2005, from **www.seniors.gov.ab.ca/css/premiers_council**

- provides information on disability issues, human rights and government policy

Quality Mall. Retrieved May 9, 2005, from **www.qualitymall.org**

- offers information about person-centred supports for persons with developmental disabilities

Steps Forward: Inclusive Post-Secondary Education Society. Retrieved April 14, 2005, from **www.stepsforward.homestead.com/Introduction.html**

- a British Columbia-based organization with information on inclusive post-secondary education for persons with intellectual disabilities and links to related articles

The Arc. Retrieved April 16, 2005, from **www.thearc.org**

- has information on activities, resources and related links for all children and adults with cognitive, intellectual and developmental disabilities

The Association for the Neurologically Disabled of Canada. Retrieved April 17, 2005, from **www.and.ca**

- provides at-home rehabilitation evaluation and therapy programs treating individuals with a broad range of disabilities

Western Economic Development Canada. The Community Futures Development Corporations: Entrepreneurs with Disabilities Network. Retrieved May 9, 2005, from **www.communityfutures.ca/disabilities**

- provides information regarding funding available to entrepreneurs with disabilities, including best practices and success stories

The Family Village. Retrieved April 19, 2005, from **www.familyvillage.wisc.edu/index.htmlx**

- has information for people with disabilities, their parents and friends

The Roeher Institute. Retrieved April 19, 2005, from **www.roeher.ca**

- a research and development organization dedicated to the equality, citizenship and human rights of persons with intellectual and other disabilities
- includes on-line catalogue of publications

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CHAPTER 8

Persons With a Diagnosed Mental Illness

WHATWORKS?

Career–building Strategies for People From Diverse Groups

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Persons With a Diagnosed Mental Illness

What do I wish I had known when I started working with people diagnosed with a mental illness?

"I wish I had known how deeply disabling in terms of confidence and one's sense of competency mental illness can be. I don't think any of us grasp the depth of despair that individuals who suffer from mental health disabilities experience, and the amazing ways in which they cope."

Sandra Taylor

East Central Community Mental Health Services

Introduction

Statistics

The Canadian Mental Health Association reports that one in five Canadians will experience a mental health problem at some point in their lives.[1] Three per cent, or nearly one million Canadians, live with a severe and persistent mental illness.[2] In general, mental illness involves an impairment of thought, mood, perception, orientation or memory.[3]

"The *Employment Equity Act* defines persons with disabilities as individuals who have a long-term or recurring physical, mental, sensory, psychiatric or learning impairment, and who:

a) consider themselves to be disadvantaged in employment by reason of that impairment, or

b) believe that an employer or potential employer is likely to consider them to be disadvantaged in employment by reason of that impairment."[4]

An individual diagnosed with a mental illness is referred to as a person with a mental illness, person with a psychiatric disability and person being treated for a mental disorder, among others. The people these various terms describe have serious mental health problems that may cause disruption in their major life activities, including caring for themselves, working and learning. The onset of mental health problems occurs most frequently during adolescence or young adulthood but can occur at any age. The symptoms of the problems are often hidden or "invisible" except during acute phases.

General Characteristics

Terminology to avoid

Don't use the disability to describe the whole person:

"She's a schizophrenic."

"He's a psychotic."

Don't use terms that suggest pity or fear:

"He suffers from depression."

"She's a victim of schizophrenia."

Don't use slang or common terms that demean:

"Crazy, lunatic, psycho, psychotic, neurotic, mad, maniac, demented, mental, loony . . ." Some of these words describe behaviour, but again, they should not be used to describe a person. Except for their legal use, the terms "insane" and "insanity" are derogatory.[5]

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 4th edition, text revision, (known as the DSM-IV), is the most highly regarded handbook about the classification and coding of mental illnesses. The coding is based on the International Classification of Diseases, the ninth revision, and is filled with detailed coding information to provide the most specific diagnostic data. This chapter will focus on the following mental disabilities:

- mood disorders
- schizophrenic and paranoid disorders
- anxiety disorders
- personality disorders
- eating disorders.

Although not strictly or exclusively considered mental illnesses, three additional disorders are included here because they are often highly co-related to mental health and illness:

- substance abuse disorders
- suicidal behaviour
- Tourette's disorder.

Descriptions of mental illnesses[6]

Mood disorders

Mood disorders are also called affective disorders. The most common are bipolar (manic-depressive) and unipolar (depressive) disorders.

These disorders are characterized by noticeable and persistent disturbances of mood that colour the individual's view of the world. Mood disorders may result in problems in the following areas that could affect the counselling process:

- loss of interest
- social skills
- memory
- performance skills
- grandiose thought
- unrealistic thinking (impaired insight)
- rapid thought
- periods of mania, in the case of bipolar disorder.

In Canada, eight per cent of the population will experience major depression while one per cent will experience bipolar disorder that combines periods of depression and manic behaviour.[7] Mood disorders are treatable; however, many people with mood disorders fail to seek treatment. Treatment may include antidepressant medications and education in combination with various forms of psychotherapy, such as cognitive behaviour therapy.[8]

Drug therapy is going through a number of challenges and changes at this time, but research indicates that over eighty per cent of those treated with antidepressant medication respond favourably.[9]

Schizophrenic and paranoid disorders[10]

Schizophrenic and paranoid disorders are mental disorders characterized by disturbed language, communication, thought and perception.

Schizophrenic and paranoid disorders may result in problems in the following areas that could affect the counselling and work search processes:

- attention and practice deficits
- abstract thinking
- planning and problem solving
- memory
- organizational skills
- verbal memory
- hallucinations and delusions.

Schizophrenia differs from other mental illnesses in the intensity of care that it requires. Treatment consists of a combination of medication, education, primary care services, hospital care and community services such as adequate housing and employment.[11] The most common form of treatment is drug therapy. Since, anti-psychotic drugs have significant side effects, treatment may also include anti-parkinsonian drugs. Side effects from drugs used in treatment range from drowsiness to blurred vision and may cause risk or danger (e.g. when using certain machinery on the job). The best prescription drugs control the symptoms of schizophrenia; there is no cure for the disease.

According to *A Report on Mental Illnesses in Canada*, schizophrenia affects one per cent of the population, most of whom experience onset in their teen or early adult years. Up to 80 per cent of people diagnosed with schizophrenia will abuse substances during their lifetime. The consequences of this disorder are alarming—between 40 to 60 per cent of diagnosed individuals could attempt suicide and up to 10 per cent may die as a result.[12]

Anxiety disorders[13]

Anxiety disorders are overreactions to distress or fear and may include anxiety or panic attacks; focused anxieties are called phobias. Anxiety disorders are the most common of all mental illnesses. Anxiety disorders that could affect the counselling and work search processes include:

- social phobia: fear of social situations; an individual will avoid speaking in front of people as well as going to public events
- agoraphobia: fear of open, public places

- panic disorder: repeated and unpredictable panic attacks which may involve sweating, shortness of breath, a sense of choking or fainting. The fear that a panic attack may occur is called anticipatory anxiety.
- post-traumatic stress disorder: flashbacks, persistent frightening thoughts and memories, anger or irritability in response to a terrifying experience in which physical harm occurred or was threatened.[14]

Anxiety disorders are treated more often on an out-patient basis or in clinics rather than hospital stays. Drug therapy (anti-depressants or anti-anxiety drugs) and cognitive behaviour therapy, which helps people turn their anxious thoughts into more rational and less anxiety-producing ideas, may be used. Drowsiness is a side effect of drug treatment, which may affect the counselling process. It is thought that about 12 per cent of the population experiences anxiety disorders, but this number may be higher because the anxiety disorder itself may stop some people from seeking treatment.[15]

Personality disorders[16]

Personality disorders reflect personality traits that are used inappropriately and become maladaptive. Personality disorders cause behaviours that deviate from expectations of society. Behaviours indicative of a personality disorder are pervasive, inflexible, stable over time and lead to distress and impairment. Because personality disorders are very individualistic, clients may present a range of behaviours. It is thought that personality disorders begin due to a complex interplay of early life experiences with genetic and environmental factors. Experts in this field consider neglect, separation and abuse to be key factors in the development of a personality disorder. Examples of personality disorders include anti-social personality disorder, obsessive-compulsive personality disorder, borderline personality disorder, narcissistic personality disorder, paranoid personality disorder and histrionic personality disorder.

Diagnosis and treatment of personality disorders can be challenging, often because of accompanying complications such as alcohol or drug abuse, sexual dysfunction, anxiety disorder, eating disorder, depression and suicidal thoughts. When treated effectively, individuals usually receive intensive personal and group psychotherapy, anti-depressant drugs and family and community support.

Eating disorders[17]

Eating disorders are a serious disturbance in one's eating patterns, eating too much or too little, as well as becoming overly concerned about body shape and size. Eating disorders occur because of a combination of psychological, social and biological factors (and a distorted perception of one's own body, probably influenced by society's overarching concern about thinness). The three most common eating disorders are anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa and binge eating disorder. Although experienced by men, most people diagnosed with an eating disorder are girls or women; in fact, three per cent of the female population will likely experience an eating disorder at some time in their lives.[18]

Some individuals with anorexia or bulimia may recover but others will have issues with food their whole lives. In addition to the loss of functioning and balance in their lives, people diagnosed with an eating disorder may face physiological problems such as kidney failure or heart conditions. Anorexic individuals are more susceptible to anxiety disorders, depression and alcohol dependency.

Successful treatment consists of a combination of the following:

- monitoring physical symptoms
- cognitive therapy
- behavioural therapy
- nutritional counselling
- body image therapy
- education
- medication, if necessary.

It is extremely important that people who have concurrent mental illnesses, such as depression, anxiety disorder or alcoholism receive treatment for these illnesses.[19]

Substance use disorders

A substance use disorder is the continued use of substances despite negative consequences in major life areas.[20] It is also defined as a progressive dependency on a substance (alcohol, glue, pharmaceutical drugs or illegal drugs) that may trigger other mental disorders and results in withdrawal if the substance is no longer used.[21]

Long-term effects of heavy alcohol use can lead to serious health problems such as stomach ulcers, sexual problems, liver disease, brain damage and many kinds of cancer.[22] Inhalant abuse damages the central nervous system, leading to behaviours similar to those associated with psychotic disorders. The Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission's (AADAC) informative fact sheets called the *ABCs* and *Beyond the ABCs* provide detailed listings of the effects of alcohol and drug use.[23] Common treatments include withdrawing from the substance, psychotherapy, education and 12-step programs.

Frequently, substance use disorders are diagnosed concurrently with other mental illnesses. Health Canada classifies these co-occurrences into five categories:[24]

- substance use and mood and anxiety disorders
- substance use and severe and persistent mental disorders (including problems related to anger, impulsivity and aggression)
- substance use and personality disorders
- substance use and eating disorders
- other substance use and mental health disorders (including sexual disorders and problem gambling).

People in these categories are not homogeneous; they are people experiencing complex and varying disorders.[25]

Substance abuse and mental health disorders intersect and overlap in myriad ways. Daley and Moss[26] identify several:

- Addiction increases the risk of developing a mental illness.
- Mental illness increases the risk of developing an addiction.
- Addiction affects the adherence to psychiatric treatment.
- Symptoms of mental illnesses may affect the onset, duration and effectiveness of addictions treatment. One example is that stimulant abusers will experience an emotional crash as part of withdrawal.
- Symptoms of mental illnesses may result from the experience of addictions. An example is that depression or anxiety may result from the loss of a job or a marriage or from a traumatic event related to the procuring of drugs.
- Over time, symptoms may become difficult to distinguish. Clients may present with a complex set of symptoms.
- Disorders can develop independently at different times.
- Untreated addiction problems can contribute to a relapse of the mental illness, and untreated psychiatric problems can contribute to a relapse of the substance use disorder.

"When a person has a co-occurring condition, they are affected—physically, psychologically, socially, economically and spiritually—by both an emotional or psychiatric illness and chemical dependency. Although the two conditions are separate and independent, they interact in ways that increase the complexity of diagnosis, treatment and recovery." [27]

A recent study in British Columbia found that 55 per cent of mental health service users had substance abuse issues accompanying their first episode of mental illness.[28] Career counsellors need to be aware that they are dealing with multi-faceted issues requiring a range of treatment and community resources.

Suicidal behaviour

Although not a mental illness, suicidal behaviour is highly correlated with mental illnesses. Experts in the field suggest that the suicidal person is feeling so much pain that they can see no other options. "The suicidal mind has been described as constricted, filled with a sense of self-hatred, rejection, and hopelessness."[29]

Suicide is a leading cause of death for men and women from adolescence to middle age. It accounts for 24 per cent of deaths of those who are 15 to 24 years and 16 per cent of deaths for people who are 25 to 44. Women have a higher rate of attempted suicide, while the mortality rate for men is four times that for women. Suicide may be a possible result of those individuals diagnosed with borderline personality disorder and depression.[30]

Although every age group has unique factors with which to cope, the following framework is one way to categorize the factors associated with suicidal behaviour.

The framework includes four categories of factors:[31]

- *Predisposing factors* are enduring factors that make one vulnerable to suicidal behaviour. Examples are mental illness, abuse, family history of suicide and difficulty with peer relationships.
- *Precipitating factors* are acute factors that create a crisis. Examples are financial difficulties, personal conflict and loss or rejection because of one's background or sexual orientation.
- *Contributing factors* increase the exposure of a person to either predisposing factors or precipitating factors. Examples are risk-taking behaviour, substance abuse, suicide of a friend, physical illness and an unstable family.
- *Protective factors* actually decrease the risk of suicidal behaviour. Examples are resiliency, sense of humour, tolerance for frustration, adaptive coping skills and positive, healthy family relationships.

Treatment programs seek to address the various factors that influence suicidal behaviour.

Tourette's disorder

Tourette's disorder, also called Tourette's syndrome, is a neurological disorder characterized by involuntary body movements (motor tics) and vocal outbursts (verbal tics) that occur many times a day nearly every day for at least twelve months. Symptoms may worsen due to stress. New research in the DSM–IV suggests that to diagnose Tourette's disorder, symptoms do not need to cause distress or impair function. By definition, Tourette's disorder must manifest before an individual is 18 years old.[32]

More important than the motor and vocal tics in social adaptation are other conditions and behaviours. The most common associated conditions are obsessive-compulsive disorders, inattention (such as attention-deficit-hyperactivity disorder), learning disabilities, impulsiveness and behaviour problems.[33]

Treatment usually occurs with moderate or severe symptoms and frequently takes the form of supportive counselling, medications and behaviour therapy.[34]

Issues relevant to career and employment counselling

Responses to medication

It is not always possible to distinguish whether the traits a person with a mental health disability exhibits are caused by the disorder or its treatment.[35] The more overt side effects of drug therapy, as well as more subtle side effects such as mood swings, decreased psychomotor control and concentration difficulties, are of major importance in the counselling process since they "often present major barriers to the career/employment options open to the individual. Over the past decade, professionals in the field report that some employment barriers are straightforward (e.g. the operation of high speed equipment is contraindicated with some medications). Others are more subtle and relate to the impact of a client's symptoms on other individuals (e.g. the public, potential employer or counsellor)."[36]

Rate of recovery

People with mental health disabilities can play an important part in their recovery but they can't "snap out of it" or "pull themselves together." They don't "lack will power" nor are they "weak." Rarely continuously ill, people with mental health disabilities may experience cyclical periods of ability and disability. Many develop successful strategies for their periods of disability if given support to do so (e.g. through workplace accommodations).[37]

> *"Remember that for most people their mental illness is episodic or it can be resolved. Mental illness is not a life sentence. Nearly 85 per cent of people diagnosed with a mental illness will return to a productive level of functioning."*
>
> Sandra Taylor
>
> East Central Community Mental Health Services

Stress

Response to stress is as individualistic for persons with mental health disabilities as it is for persons without these disabilities.[38] Stress can be caused by anything from struggling to do basic self-care to managing finances to relationship difficulties. People do not always understand the triggers of stress. The counsellor can support the client in determining what causes them stress and then help the client develop practical coping strategies.

One cause of stress that has frequently been overlooked is the practice of placing an individual into a low-wage, unskilled job and not helping that person to move on. Sometimes the counsellor or job developer is unaware that the "stress created by a poverty-level lifestyle may be more destabilizing than the degree of stress engendered by challenging work."[39] This kind of mismatched placement often occurs because of concern about the client losing benefits due to a relapse or job loss.

Entry-level work can, however, be a stepping stone to a more suitable job and not an end in itself. This progression needs to be built into the career and employment plan.

> *"People thrive on unconditional positive regard. Approach an individual with a mental illness no differently than you would anyone else. Have the belief in people that they can accomplish what they need to accomplish."*
>
> Sandra Taylor
>
> East Central Community Mental Health Services

Beyond stigmatization

"Of all persons with a disability, those with a serious mental illness face the highest degree of stigmatization in the workplace and the greatest barriers to employment."[40]

Despite increased awareness and understanding of mental illnesses, misconceptions persist. Perhaps the most damaging myths are those that promote the idea that people who have a mental illness are a danger to society. In fact, research has shown that people who have been diagnosed with a mental disorder are no more likely than the general public to commit crimes or act violently.[41]

Another myth promotes the concept that people with a mental disorder are incapable of maintaining a job because:

- People with a mental disability are less intelligent and have trouble learning.
- Mental illness is caused by a personal weakness.[42]

It is important for counsellors to deal head-on with the myths and stigma facing their clients. Some studies point out that there are a number of tasks counsellors can perform that will help reduce the effects of these myths:

- Re-examine their own views about disabilities and confront any stereotypes they may harbour.
- Help clients develop or enhance appropriate social skills (e.g. by helping clients learn how to make new friends if that is an important goal for them).
- Be proactive in sharing positive attitudes about their clients, who have a mental disability, with colleagues and employers.[43]

> *"The level of people's ability to cope always amazes me. No matter if a person has been diagnosed with depression, schizophrenia or bipolar disorder, they continue to desire to function in a healthy manner. They want to be loved, be productive, get respect— no different than any other person. That destigmatizes a lot of things for me."*
>
> Sandra Taylor
>
> East Central Community Mental Health Services

Improve decision-making skills

Persons diagnosed with a mental illness may have little experience in making genuine choices and/or accepting responsibility for decisions that they have made. Sometimes their support system does not expect them to make their own decisions. Therefore, their responses to the decision-making process may include:

- impulsive decision-making
- a fatalistic approach
- an intuitive approach, regardless of appropriateness
- agonized indecision.[44]

Increase knowledge about self and work roles

Often, persons diagnosed with a mental illness lack a range of life experiences and are unfamiliar with the progression of work roles that are the foundation of one's knowledge about the world of work. Some clients will require help to identify their skills, interests and values and to test this self-knowledge against the realities of the work world.

Some professionals feel that conversations with people who have a mental disorder are "dominated by concerns about their symptoms, medication dosage and adherence, stress levels, and daily habits." Because of this practice, an individual's talents, abilities, strengths and interests are forgotten or relegated to the background by the concerned individuals helping them.[45]

Perceived disincentives to work

Approximately half of the people with disabilities in Canada receive income from public income support systems. Such systems include income from a pension plan, a long-term disability pension or income support. Persons with disabilities who receive income from these sources may have the qualifications and the desire to work, but may fear jeopardizing their benefits if they take a full-time job. Considering that persons with disabilities often include medical costs among their basic needs, many feel this is too big a risk to take. In addition, some fear losing benefits, not just because of the cost but also because of the difficulty in having benefits reinstated if the job does not last.

However, financial assistance programs (Alberta Works Income Support) in Alberta have changed. Individuals receiving financial assistance are encouraged to maximize self-sufficiency (which for some means working). Individuals who are working while receiving financial assistance may receive a supplement to their earnings (i.e. a portion of their wages may be exempt when their benefits are calculated). Also in Alberta, people leaving financial assistance for jobs may continue to receive health benefits both for themselves and their children.

So, while loss of health benefits may still be a concern for clients, it may not be a reality. Counsellors are encouraged to become familiar with financial assistance programs and help clients to get more information about income exemptions and health coverage available to them before dismissing the idea of finding work.

> *"Motivation is always a big issue—and the willingness to invest the energy hoping that the outcome will be favourable. It's hard for some people to move beyond the fear. I always ask about their daily routine and sometimes it is sleep, go to medical appointments, go home and sleep some more."*
>
> Sikin Samanani
>
> Calgary Health Region

Know employer concerns

"Public perceptions, as shaped through the media, clearly influence social attitudes towards people with a serious mental illness. The result is that many employers resist hiring [persons with a diagnosed mental illness] due to an inaccurate belief and fear that people with mental illnesses cannot work effectively or that meeting their needs [such as workplace accommodations] will cost a great deal."[46] A Watson Wyatt report [47]indicated that over 70 per cent of the Canadian employers surveyed reported that psychological conditions, including depression, stress and anxiety, were the leading cause of both short-term and long-term disability claims.

In a recent Canadian study, the majority of employers contacted indicated that they have reintegration programs in place for employees who become disabled. However, they do not have any proactive recruiting programs that target potential candidates who have any disability. Any recruiting and placement inroads that this study uncovered involved partnership building. In some cases, a service agency will build a relationship with an employer before placing any clients there. Ongoing support is another aspect that contributes to successful placements.[48]

One example of this kind of relationship is the coaching that Canadian Mental Health Association is providing to people with mental disabilities hired at Wal-Mart stores in a variety of cities. "CMHA has proven that coaching works; we do this all the time with our friends. The approach is basically, 'let's find a way to work through this problem and keep your job'."[49]

Responding to Challenges: Strategies and Practices

Focusing on clients' issues

The purpose of engaging people with mental health disabilities in career counselling is to help them discover their unique values and interests, to understand how these relate to the world of work and to develop a realistic and meaningful action plan.

> *"Don't forget to ask your clients what they want to accomplish. Goal setting is crucial. Accountability is part of the everyday process. I think it is so important that people have a treatment plan. People come in with very different ideas about what they need assistance with to make their lives better. We need to work with this."*
>
> Sandra Taylor
>
> East Central Community Mental Health Services

To address many of the challenges mentioned above, it is important *not* to separate personal and work-related issues from each other. Instead, practitioners recommend that counsellors focus on the issue that is important to the client. If a client's top five goals don't involve work at this time, then consider focusing on one goal that is deemed by that person to be important.[50] For example, if a client wants to learn how to use e-mail in order to communicate with relatives in another part of the world, then that becomes a goal that counsellors can help the client achieve. In so doing, the individual will be learning the skills involved in accomplishing a goal as well as learning computer-based communication skills.

> *"You must be patient and open-minded and continue to reframe your approach to fit the client's goals."*
>
> Sikin Samanani
>
> Calgary Health Region

Certified occupational therapists may choose to use the Canadian Occupational Performance Measure (COPM) with mental health clients in order to facilitate goal setting with respect to areas of self-care, leisure and productivity. The COPM is an individualized outcome measure designed to detect change in a client's self-perception of occupational performance. Individuals report that they like it because it allows them to assess their own progress as opposed to the health professionals making that judgment.[51] The Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists notes additional research into the uses of the COPM. It is also being explored "as a tool for assessing outcomes in eating disorder groups."[52]

Communicating with clients

A mental health disability may impair a client's ability to communicate. Therefore, it is important to aid understanding by communicating as clearly and concisely as possible:[53]

- If the client seems to be having difficulty understanding, repeat what you have said and ask the client to restate in his or her own words what you have discussed.[54]
- If the client seems anxious or distracted in your office, move to a quieter location, if possible.[55]
- Make requests and suggestions positively, directly and honestly.[56]
- Refrain from expressing negative feelings. If you must express displeasure, be clear that you are talking about a particular behaviour or action, not about the person.[57]
- Show appreciation and be genuine.[58]

Diffusing a volatile situation[59]

Practitioners have remarked that if the need to diffuse a volatile situation arises, it may be useful to consider a structured communication list such as the following:

1. Slow the situation down. What's causing the volatility? Remove the person or object that's the focus of frustration. Let the client talk.
2. Be aware of the client's personal space. If you are within it, she or he might feel attacked. Give the client more space than normal. Keep listening.
3. Ask what the client would like to do or what would help. Ask if intervention is needed.

4. Don't appeal to logic. Don't try to talk the client out of it or argue. Don't bring up emotionally charged issues.
5. When you do speak, talk slowly and in a non-confrontational manner. Agree with the client when appropriate. Say something positive.
6. Use body language that conveys calmness. Don't move suddenly or speak in an authoritarian tone.
7. As soon as possible, encourage the client to make some choices. This helps the client to regain some control over the situation and decreases the danger of the volatility continuing.
8. Be aware that symptoms might worsen and that it is important to get help.

Creating a positive approach

Career counsellors offer some excellent points about creating an environment that encourages building strength and recognizes diversity. "By creating a climate where everyone feels included, valued and accepted, we begin to create respect and provide the framework for working toward career and employment success which is usually the objective of all our clients."[60] Ways to create a positive environment include minimizing distractions, using a variety of learning aids and media and conducting one's interactions as clearly as possible.

Amundson[61] promotes the word "mattering" to refer to the positive relationship between counsellor and client. He identifies four levels of mattering:

- Being visible. Clients feel that someone recognizes their presence and makes them feel welcome.
- Valuing. Clients feel important because they have the undivided attention of the counsellor.
- Offering help. Clients are given an opportunity to help others whenever possible.
- Building a relationship. Clients feel that a positive connection has been built.

Working towards a positive outcome

A number of factors that may indicate a positive counselling outcome for persons diagnosed with a mental illness were identified by Burwash and Vellacott[62] and continue to resonate with practitioners today.

Clients:

- have a recent and/or consistent work history
- see work as a value they relate to
- have a relatively predictable or stable illness
- are co-operative and open to the counsellor's input
- are able to participate in regular, structured activities
- can communicate a good impression of themselves physically and verbally
- have the support of significant others.

Career and employment counselling can provide valuable assistance for people with a diagnosed mental disorder. "Research suggests that strategies that help people manage their life are more useful, at least in the area of employment, than those focused on helping people manage their illness."[63]

This kind of optimistic approach is at the forefront of the work of a group of psychologists led by Martin E.P. Seligman, who wants to shift the emphasis in his discipline from a disease model to a health model called "positive psychology." The aim is to investigate the positive qualities that help people flourish: courage, optimism, hope, honesty, interpersonal skills, work ethic and perseverance.[64]

Positive psychology[65] is also used to describe the study of the characteristics that make up mental health, for example:

- the ability to enjoy life
- resilience
- balance
- flexibility
- self-actualization.

Killeen and O'Day suggest three reasons why some people are successful at school or work:[66]

- They received positive messages about their future potential.
- They were able to secure access to training and funding.
- They received peer and community support, both informally and through more formal groups.

Professionals report that this list of flexible, long-term support both on and off the job remains current:[67]

- engaging the client in career planning
- setting goals and making work choices
- conducting job placement and follow-up
- helping the client prepare for information interviews, job interviews and any pre-employment screening
- negotiating reasonable accommodations
- acquiring specific job skills
- obtaining transportation and clothing appropriate to the work setting
- estimating how employment will affect income support benefits
- taking advantage of established programs
- establishing positive relationships with co-workers and employers
- helping clients build relationships and create allies
- assisting in changing jobs.

Whatever combination of services clients require, professionals will be effective in supporting clients to reach their desired employment goals if they adopt a participant-centred, holistic and incremental approach.[68]

> *"To achieve good mental health, we must strive for balance in our lives."*
> Canadian Mental Health Association[69]

Counselling approaches

Behavioural approach[70]
A behavioural approach may be successful with clients who have a mental disorder because the focus is on events (behaviours) that are easy to observe and are clearly defined. Accountability is built into this approach, since the outcome readily shows whether or not the desired change has occurred. The first step in applying a behavioural technique is to define the problem:

1. What happens just before the behaviour occurs? (i.e. what's the antecedent?)
2. Where, how often and for how long does the behaviour occur?
3. What's the consequence of the behaviour?
4. How long does the behaviour continue?
5. What happens after the behaviour occurs (or what is the consequence)?

The second step involves constructing a baseline or standard against which change can be measured. This process involves observing the individual over a period of time and recording the frequency of the behaviour.

The third step involves choosing a technique with which to change behaviour.

Choose, get and keep approach[71]
This approach to career counselling persons with mental health disabilities was first described by Anthony, Howell and Danley 20 years ago when applied to supported employment services and has been adapted by many others.

1. The "choose" phase

Client choice is inherent in this phase. The goal of the choose phase is to select an employment goal compatible with client values and qualifications. Begin by ensuring that the client wants to work, surveying the risks and benefits of taking a job. The next step is employment goal setting, which includes:

- assessment of interests, values, education, training and skills
- taking extreme care to objectify personal values so that they are observable and provide criteria for making an informed career choice
- using personal criteria and qualifications to identify the type of work, the work environment and the number of hours.

Example of a goal: I want to work as a library assistant within two months in a small art/music library for 20 hours a week.

The next step is job development, in which the client's goal is matched to job opportunities. In the decision-making step, after the participant has clarified his or her goal and is deciding which jobs to apply for, significant others (family, professionals, friends) may be involved to support the client's goal.

Making a choice is not always a comfortable activity for clients, so this first phase may take longer. People with mental health disabilities may feel discouraged.

Fully engage the client by building a close, trusting relationship. Allot time to teach decision-making skills so clients can improve their ability to make decisions with less professional support in the future.

Allow clients to repeat this phase if necessary, even after reaching the "getting" and "keeping" phases. Efforts to educate employers and co-workers will contribute to client success.

2. The "get" phase

This phase begins with job search and closes with the acceptance of a job offer. Teach job search skills to engage the client and to prepare him or her to apply for other positions or promotions when ready. Undertake placement planning. This includes:

- job analysis—matching the client's social, mental and physical qualifications with the requirements of the job
- identifying tasks needed to secure the job
- identifying accommodations that might be required.

Direct placement may be part of this approach. This involves presenting the client to the potential employer, particularly if the client has good work potential but may not present well in an interview. You will need to know and apply a variety of strategies to overcome the employer's perceived liabilities of your client.

Placement support involves helping clients obtain the skills and resources needed to obtain the job independently. This would include using strategies to address any liability that the employer might perceive.

3. The "keep" phase

In this phase, less attention is paid to helping clients acquire necessary job skills than to helping them use existing or learned skills for the job. In the case of persons diagnosed with a mental illness, this usually means focusing on the interpersonal and intrapersonal skills demanded in the workplace. Activities in the keep phase include:

- helping clients do functional and resource assessments of the skills and supports they need to be successful and satisfied in the job
- planning the interventions needed to address any skill and resource deficits
- planning skill development
- co-ordinating services and training
- modifying the work environment and arranging job accommodation if needed.

Other counselling ideas to ponder

Caporoso and Kiselica, among others, advocate a developmental approach to career counselling people with mental disorders to transition them back into the community.[72] Traditional employment counselling focuses on assessment, followed by helping the client prepare to job search alone. Instead, an incremental developmental approach is recommended to help transition people back into their communities.

You need to know...[74]

- *how the client learns best.*
- *who are the members of the client's support system in the community (e.g. doctors, hospital, family, friends, therapists and other community agencies). See yourself as part of that team.*
- *whatever the individuals in the client's support system can tell you about the client that applies to the client's goals*
- *the impact of the client's disability on work and life aspirations. What are the client's dreams?*
- *what other community agencies, programs and services might be of assistance to the client*
- *where to refer each client.*

Professionals in the field continue to promote the following points in counselling clients diagnosed with a mental illness:[73]

- Be flexible and creative.
  - Consider non-traditional employment options for this group (e.g. part-time, flex-time, home-based work, work sharing and contract work).
  - Realize that there are many ways to achieve the same results.

- Understand the client's medical background.
  - How does the disability affect lifestyle?
  - What are the behavioural implications?
  - How does the client respond to medication and other treatment?
- Apply a task management approach.
  - Break every issue or problem into smaller components.
  - Take a step-by-step route to goals.

Helping clients with problem solving and organization

Sometimes mental disabilities can result in problems with organizing and problem solving. You can help your client with these issues by:[75]

- modelling task performance, then encouraging your client to use self-instruction as follows:
  - The client observes you modelling task performance.
  - The client performs the task while listening to your instructions.
  - The client performs the task while whispering instructions to self.
  - The client performs the task while just thinking the instructions.
- using supportive, structured methods that clearly set out guidelines, expectations and consequences:
  - Be well organized in your approach.
  - Use a checklist system for tasks and objectives at each meeting.
  - Provide constant feedback.
  - Begin by discussing limited options, then progress to additional options as the client shows readiness.
- making time sequence concrete by using timelines, pictures, etc. to help the client visualize time and sequence.

Helping clients set realistic goals

You can help clients set realistic goals by:[77]

- listening to the client's ideas about their goals
- finding out how clients have been using their skills
- exploring what is meaningful to each individual
- providing honest, non-judgmental feedback

Helping clients deal with problems that occur outside the counselling process[76]

1. *Listen to the client's whole story about a problem or concern. Summarize it and check it. Take notes.*
2. *Ask what the client would like you to do. If the client requests that you not take action, respect this.*
3. *Don't offer advice in areas beyond your expertise. If the client decides that you can help with a particular issue, keep the client informed of each step you take. Stop when and if you are asked to do so.*
4. *Don't do more than the client asks you to do. Your task is to support the client and provide reliable information.*
5. *Recognize your limitations. Don't say you'll do what you can't deliver on.*
6. *The client must take an active role in clarifying the problem, finding an advocate and seeking information. Meet with third parties that you contact on behalf of the client with the client present. Support the client but don't take over.*
7. *Remember that a client's frustration may stem from an inability to communicate acceptably. Help the client with this issue.*
8. *A client may be concerned about taking an issue to a higher authority. Let the client know that people in senior positions may be able to act on the client's concern. Help the client prepare material to present the problem effectively.*
9. *Keep your supervisor informed about your activities and let your client know that you are doing this.*
10. *Encourage your client to share the problem with others in similar situations. Mutual support and common action can often overcome feelings of isolation.*

- helping clients examine all the alternatives, options and different ways of doing work
- ensuring that clients realize the demands and requirements of specific career goals
- teaching goal-setting and action-planning skills.

Remember the popular acronym for goal setting using the SMARTS criteria: specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, time-targeted and supported. Goals that meet these criteria will have more chance of success.

> *"Just the process of seeing an individual getting excited about goal setting and making changes is satisfying for me. Also, thinking outside the box rather than just trying to fit the client into what's out there. Reframe your approach to fit their goals. It's a partnership, and along the way you have to evaluate and monitor and make sure you're in sync with what they want. If it's not working, then do something else."*
> Sikin Samanani
> Calgary Health Region

Helping clients deal with social stigma[78]

To help clients deal with the stigma our society attaches to mental disability, counsellors can:

- Encourage clients to become involved in self-help groups.
- Encourage clients to increase their knowledge by learning about mental disorders and treatments.
- Build relationships with and work with hospital staff and community-based programs, as appropriate, to improve services to clients and to raise public awareness about this issue.

> *"Learning about and using self-advocacy skills can be a catalyst to understanding who you are as a person with a disability. At the heart of it, for people with invisible disabilities especially, is the desire to blend in."*
> Dr. Patricia Pardo
> University of Calgary[79]

Helping clients with the issue of disclosure

The issue of disclosure is a significant one for clients with a mental health disability. Each situation must be dealt with on an individual basis. Some research sources recommend helping the client do a risk analysis, examining the pros and cons of any decision.[80] For example, the client may be concerned about the risk of stigma in the workplace—employers or co-workers might feel uncomfortable or treat the client differently. A benefit of disclosure is that it opens the door for accommodations. You can help clients with this issue by helping them determine positive ways to describe the impact of the disability.[81]

Focusing on Employment

Supported employment

"Supported employment is real work in an integrated setting with ongoing support provided by an agency with expertise in finding employment for people with disabilities.

What is real work?

Real work is work that would be done by a typical member of the workforce if it were not done by the worker with a disability. Supported employment placements are work not 'vocational training,' 'work experience' or 'work preparation.' Supported employees work **for pay** of at least minimum wage or the standard pay for that position.

What is an integrated work setting?

An integrated work setting is one where the proportion of disabled workers is roughly equivalent to the proportion of people with disabilities in the general population. Large work crews or 'enclaves,' where disabled people work together on one site, are excluded from this definition.

What is ongoing support?

Ongoing support refers to job-support services that are, theoretically, not time limited. The service providing ongoing support should be committed to providing support for as long as the worker with a disability requires it in order to perform his or her work satisfactorily."[82]

This individual placement and support model is more effective than other rehabilitation models, the most common of which is the pre-vocational training model, which expects that an individual will be ready for employment once they have undergone a long period of preparation. There is now ready acceptance of the workplace as a social support system along with opportunities for people to gain, or reclaim, a sense of self-esteem, self-control and self-worth.[83] It is also more accepted that a developmental approach to employment counselling is needed to transition people into work. It is very difficult to expect people with mental illnesses to look for work without the support of a counsellor or a job developer.

Supportive environments can be a turning point for many people wanting to work. Counsellors have remarked it is worthwhile to provide a more protected environment to those who need it. There are many examples of sheltered, guided and assisted environments that work well.[84]

Job accommodation

"Job accommodation means providing technical aids or making adjustments to the workplace environment and its procedures."[85] Social support and the opportunity to have some flexibility in performing the work are the two main job accommodations most frequently required by people with a mental disorder. Some examples of job accommodations in three areas are: [86]

Training

- Assign the new employee to a supportive supervisor.
- Designate a co-worker as peer support or advocate.
- Provide individualized training for workers who may have trouble learning new material.
- Encourage additional training time if needed.
- Provide detailed written instructions of duties, responsibilities and expectations.
- Provide or be open to the use of a job coach.

Work practices

- Permit phone calls to supportive individuals away from the workstation.
- Provide a quiet, distraction-free workplace for individuals who lose concentration easily.
- Permit a self-paced workload.
- Allow the use of sick leave for emotional as well as physical illness.
- Consider job sharing, work from home if appropriate or part-time arrangements.
- Restructure a job to eliminate secondary tasks that pose problems for a worker with a disability by exchanging those tasks for part of another employee's job description.
- Allow overtime to be banked for use in case of illness.
- Allow workers to shift hours to accommodate recurring appointments with a therapist.

Communication

- Coach supervisors to provide clear directions and non-judgmental feedback.
- Educate managers about legislation so that they can foster discussions with employees about known disabilities and desired accommodations.
- Encourage supervisors to offer positive reinforcement and non-judgmental feedback.
- Develop strategies to deal with problems before they arise.
- Provide sensitivity training for co-workers about disabilities and why people require accommodation.
- Dispel myths by educating staff about the causes and treatment of mental disorders.

> *"You can't lose hope yourself. If you do, the client knows it in a heartbeat. It is important to be a beacon of light for people who can't find that in themselves at that time. You have to create hope and you have to be empathetic."*
> Sandra Taylor
> East Central Community Mental Health Services

In Conclusion

How do you look after yourself so that you can continue to help your clients? A number of ideas follow:[87]

- **Examine your own coping mechanisms.**
- **Explore all the skills involved in practicing unconditional positive regard.**
- **Build your awareness about your own style and approach.**
- **Read journal articles.**
- **Find out who is engaging in new developments and touch base with them.**
- **Use the Internet to explore what's out there.**
- **Attend symposia, seminars, workshops and conferences.**

> ***"Remember to make time for yourself to keep learning. Sometimes professionals spend all their time with clients and forget about their own professional development. Take time to do that because that's how you'll figure out what works and see how other professionals are helping their clients."***
>
> Sikin Samanani
> Calgary Health Region

Websites and Resource Organizations

Alberta Human Resources and Employment. *Alberta adult health benefit*. Retrieved on April 26, 2005, from **www.gov.ab.ca/hre/ahb**

- guidelines for the Alberta adult health benefit program

Alberta Human Resources and Employment. *Disability related employment supports program.* Retrieved on April 27, 2005, from **www.gov.ab.ca/hre/dres**

- includes types of assistance available to individuals to help them overcome barriers affecting employment

Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission. Retrieved on April 26, 2005, from **www.aadac.com**

- provides information for a number of audiences, as well as reports and profiles about substance abuse and treatment

Alberta Mental Health Board. Retrieved on May 19, 2005, from **www.amhb.ab.ca**

- a provincial body providing education, links, advocacy, research and evaluation of mental health services

BC Partners for Mental Health and Addictions Information. *Here to help.* Retrieved on April 27, 2005, from **www.heretohelp.bc.ca**

- seven provincial agencies collaborate on interactive tool kits, tip and fact sheets, stories and reports aimed at people with mental disabilities or substance abuse problems, their families, friends and employers

Behavior OnLine. Retrieved on April 25, 2005, from **www.behavior.net**

- a gathering place for mental health professionals and applied behavioural scientists

Canada Benefits. Retrieved on April 26, 2005, from **www.canadabenefits.gc.ca**

- has information about benefit programs and services administered by federal, provincial and territorial governments

Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention. Retrieved on April 27, 2005, from **www.suicideprevention.ca**

- provides information on suicide and suicidal behaviour, caregiver training programs and information about research projects

Canadian Human Rights Commission. Retrieved on April 27, 2005, from **www.chrc-ccdp.ca**

- offers information about the *Employment Equity Act* and the *Canadian Human Rights Act* as well as a number of relevant publications

Canadian Mental Health Association. Retrieved on April 24, 2005, from **www.cmha.ca**

- has information on mental health and mental illnesses, with links to current reports, studies and guides as well as educational and advocacy resources
- follow the link from Understanding Mental Illness to *Your Education – Your Future: A guide to college and university for students with a psychiatric disability*

Enablelink. Retrieved on April 26, 2005, from **www.abilities.ca**

- sponsored by Workers' Compensation Boards, hosts directories, the *Abilities* magazine, as well as links, articles and reports

Internet Mental Health. Retrieved on April 25, 2005, from **www.mentalhealth.com**

- begun as a way for a Canadian psychologist to share information with professionals in Japan, now includes a host of resources on mental illness, treatment, studies

Public Health Agency of Canada. Mental Health. Retrieved on April 25, 2005, from **www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/mh-sm/mentalhealth**

- includes a range of on-line materials related to the promotion of mental health, as well as the planning, delivery, cost and evaluation of mental health programs and services in Canada and the mental health issues, problems and disorders encountered by Canadians

About.com: Mental Health Services. Retrieved on April 25, 2005, from **www.mentalhealth.about.com**

- provides articles, information, resources and links on every aspect of mental health and illnesses

Mental Health Works. Canadian Mental Health Association in Ontario. Retrieved on April 25, 2005, from **www.mentalhealthworks.ca**

- for employees and employers, this site responds to concerns about mental health in the workplace
- includes mental health fact sheets, workplace news articles and links to information and resources on topics such as accessibility, accommodation, addiction, return-to-work, legal and support programs

Mental Illness section of the Canadian Health Network. Retrieved on April 25, 2005, from **www.canadian-health-network.ca** (click on Mental Health under Topics)

- the official site of the Public Health Agency of Canada including links, articles and advice

Canadian Psychiatric Association. *Mental illness and work.* Retrieved on April 25, 2005, from **www.cpa-apc.org/MIAW/pamphlets/Work.asp**

- offers information on the role of work and links to Canadian psychiatry organizations

Mental Illness Links. Health Care Information Resources (McMaster University Library). Retrieved on April 27, 2005, from **http://hsl.mcmaster.ca/tomflem/mental.html**

- has access to a host of sites with the aim of helping individuals, their friends, families and health-care providers become more knowledgeable consumers

Mental Wellness. Retrieved on April 25, 2005, from **www.mentalwellness.com**

- Janssen pharmaceuticals operates this site providing information on mental health disorders, in particular schizophrenia and bipolar disorder
- includes a glossary of terms and links to other related American associations and organizations

Mood Disorders Society of Canada. Retrieved on April 27, 2005, from **www.mooddisorderscanada.ca**

- provides information, reports, programs and policies related to depression, bipolar disorder and other disorders such as problem gambling, suicidal behaviour and anxiety disorders

Nami (National Alliance on Mental Illness). Retrieved on April 29, 2005, from **www.nami.org**

- begun as the American National Alliance for the Mentally Ill, the website provides links and information for persons with mental illnesses and their families

National Network for Mental Health. Retrieved on May 17, 2005, from **www.nnmh.ca/about.html**

- provides advocacy and education by staff and board members who are mental health consumers and survivors

Persons with Disabilities Online. Retrieved on April 25, 2005, from **www.pwd-online.ca/pwdhome.jsp?lang=en**

- a site where persons with disabilities, as well as their family members, caregivers and service providers, can access information on disability-related programs and services in Canada

Royal College of Psychiatrists. Retrieved on April 25, 2005, from **www.rcpsych.ac.uk/**

- has information for the public on many forms of mental illness

The National Eating Disorder Information Centre. Retrieved on April 27, 2005, from **www.nedic.ca**

- offers guides for families and friends, links, glossary, magazines

Schizophrenia Society of Canada. Retrieved on May 19, 2005, from **www.schizophrenia.ca**

- includes articles, links and support through public awareness, education and research

Support4Hope. Retrieved on April 29, 2005, from **www.support4hope.com/depression_and_bipolar_chat_4u.htm**

- provides support and information for people diagnosed with a mental disability and their families, with a range of topics from medications to testimonials

The Schizophrenia Home Page. Retrieved on April 26, 2005, from **www.schizophrenia.com**

- provides articles on diagnosis and treatment, tips on coping and handling crises, discussion groups, forums on medications and treatment, and an area for professionals, researchers, social workers and students exclusively focused on schizophrenia

Tourette's Disorder Information Support Hope. Retrieved on May 17, 2005, from **www.tourettes-disorder.com**

- an American-based website with the goal of promoting understanding of the disorder, including its history, diagnosis and treatment

Tourette Syndrome Foundation of Canada. Retrieved on May 17, 2005, from **www.tourette.ca**

- has questions and answers about the syndrome, as well as links and networking opportunities

Workink Alberta. Retrieved on April 29, 2005, from **http://ab.workink.com**

- provides information for professionals, persons with disabilities and employers, as well as information about job seeking and job openings

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CHAPTER 9

Persons With Learning Disabilities

WHATWORKS:

Career–building Strategies for People From Diverse Groups

Persons With Learning Disabilities

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Persons With Learning Disabilities

What do I wish I would have known when I started working with persons with learning disabilities?

"I wish that I would have known about the issue of diverse presentations. Sometimes we get 'pigeon-holed' thinking that all people with learning disabilities are the same. And they're not, not at all. Everyone is so different. The issue of behavioural presentation can be very confusing. I learned about learning disabilities through working with people."

Brian Mader
Alberta Human Resources
and Employment

Introduction

Learning disabilities, according to the Learning Disabilities Association of Canada,[1] "refer to a number of disorders that may affect the acquisition, organization, retention, understanding or use of verbal or nonverbal information. These disorders affect learning in individuals who otherwise demonstrate at least average abilities essential for thinking and/or reasoning. As such, learning disabilities are distinct from global intellectual deficiency.

Learning disabilities result from impairments in one or more processes related to perceiving, thinking, remembering or learning. These include, but are not limited to language processing; phonological processing [the system or pattern of sounds of a specific language]; visual spatial processing; processing speed; memory and attention; and executive functions (e.g. planning and decision making).

Learning disabilities range in severity and may interfere with the acquisition and use of one or more of the following:

- oral language (e.g. listening, speaking, understanding)
- reading (e.g. decoding, phonetic knowledge, word recognition, comprehension)
- written language (e.g. spelling and written expression)
- mathematics (e.g. computation, problem solving).

Learning disabilities may also involve difficulties with organizational skills, social perception, social interaction and perspective taking."

Learning disabilities:

- are lifelong
- are due to genetic and/or neurobiological factors or injury that alters brain functioning
- may co-exist with various other conditions including attentional, behavioural and emotional disorders, sensory impairments or other medical conditions
- can be remediated, compensated for and accommodated.[2]

Wong[3] explains that prior to the early 1960s, there was no recognized field of learning disabilities. Children of normal intelligence demonstrating difficulties with learning were given a variety of labels, including minimally brain damaged, perceptually impaired and so on. The learning disabilities movement began to gather strength after its inception in 1963. A general orientation to the education of exceptional children was developed and included the following elements:

- Individual differences in learning should be understood by looking at the different approaches to learning tasks.
- Educational interventions should be tailored to individual children and their processing strengths and weaknesses.
- Children with deficient learning processes might be helped to learn by strengthening deficient processes or by developing teaching methods that avoid stressing weak areas.

"At this point in time (2004), the field of learning disabilities is on an exciting path. It is solidly supported in law, it has an enormous number of well-informed advocates and professionals working on its behalf, and it is the subject of challenging and programmatic research."[4]

Statistics

Accurate statistics describing the number of Canadians who experience learning disabilities are impossible to attain, since it's likely that a significant number of adults, who were in the school system prior to the 1970s, were never diagnosed.

The Learning Disabilities Association of Canada estimates that learning disabilities affect approximately 10 per cent of the population or over three million Canadians.[5] Wong[6] reports, in 2004 five per cent of school children were identified as having learning disabilities. The following examples show how learning disabilities can affect peoples' lives:[7]

- At least one in every 10 Canadians has a learning disability. More than 80 per cent of these people have difficulty learning to read.
- More than one third of students identified with learning disabilities drop out of high school, twice the rate of their non-learning disabled peers.
- 30 to 70 per cent of adults in prison have learning disabilities.
- 25 to 40 per cent of adults receiving social allowance have learning disabilities.
- 15 to 30 per cent of adults in job-training programs have learning disabilities.

General Characteristics

People with learning disabilities can be found in all socioeconomic, cultural and ethnic groups and in every work area. They possess average or above-average intelligence and although many are gifted, their talents and skills often remain underused because their disabilities may be undiagnosed and/or misunderstood.

Common signs of a learning disability

Learning disabilities may be evident in academic, employment and social situations. They affect people's ability to interpret what they see and hear or to connect information from different parts of the brain.

> *"It was once believed that learning disabilities was a childhood disorder. We now know that this is not true—learning disabilities are lifelong and can affect friendships, school, work, self-esteem and daily life."*
>
> Learning Disabilities Association of Canada[8]

While no individual will demonstrate all of these characteristics, some common signs of learning disabilities in adults follow:[9]

- "difficulty reading, writing, spelling, inability to complete a job application form
- cannot follow written direction and/or remember several verbal directions
- problems putting thoughts down on paper
- feelings of anxiety, depression and low self-esteem
- difficulty finding or keeping a job
- difficulty budgeting and managing money
- time management difficulties
- short attention span, restlessness or hyperactivity
- difficulty remembering and following the sequence of instructions
- difficulty understanding appropriate social behaviour
- poor coordination and spatial disorientation
- difficulty with problem solving strategies."

Frequently, a clue to the presence of a learning disability is inconsistency, "a noticeable difference between areas where they function well and those where they don't. For example, a child who is able to express himself very well out loud, but can't write coherently."[10] Inconsistency may also be demonstrated through differences in tested potential and performance.

All of us exhibit some of the behaviours listed above at some time. The presence of one or more of these may not be significant. However, if a cluster of these behaviours occurs in one individual, this may indicate that an assessment is required. Assessment is discussed further in a subsequent section of this chapter.

For information about referrals for assessment, counsellors can consult the local learning disabilities association in their area or the national office of the Learning Disabilities Association of Canada.

Recognizing clients with learning disabilities

A client's work and educational history and/or social behaviours also provide keys to the presence of learning disabilities. The following checklists[11] provide another resource regarding identifying learning disabilities. Clients presenting several of the following characteristics may have learning disabilities:

Work and education

- exhibits high potential but poor performance
- often unemployed or underemployed
- no specific career plans
- frequently late and/or absent
- cannot organize belongings, time, activities or responsibilities
- academic failure
- problems starting/completing plans and assignments
- learns well when shown, but cannot follow written and/or verbal instructions
- needs ongoing encouragement and support.

Social skills

- lacks social skills, difficulty maintaining relationships; or, uses social skills to mask poor performance
- seems constantly anxious, tense, depressed; poor self-concept
- participates in few social activities
- difficulty interpreting social cues
- demanding
- withdrawn; a loner
- poor concept of personal space
- behaves inconsistently; impulsive
- age-inappropriate behaviour
- frustrated; inability to sit still
- insecure; fearful
- takes things literally.

Additional conditions related to learning disabilities

Three additional disorders have been included in this chapter:

- Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD)
- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD)
- Nonverbal Learning Disorder (NLD)

While these three additional disorders are not learning disorders, they frequently co-exist with learning disorders. Many of the career-building strategies used with clients who have learning disabilities are assumed to be adaptable for use with clients with these additional disorders.

Fetal alcohol spectrum disorder

The Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission (AADAC) provides the following information regarding fetal alcohol spectrum disorder.[12]

"Fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD) is a term used to describe the range of physical and/or mental disabilities that can result from prenatal exposure to alcohol. FASD is not a diagnosis. It is an umbrella term that encompasses these conditions:

- fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS)
- partial FAS (pFAS) or fetal alcohol effects (FAE)
- alcohol-related neurodevelopmental disorder (ARND)
- alcohol-related birth defects.

While FASD itself is not a diagnosis, its associated conditions (FAS, FAE, etc.) are. There is no cure for FASD. Its effects last a lifetime."

"A number of criteria relate to FAS. When a child has experienced prenatal alcohol exposure but does not fulfil all of the criteria for FAS, the child is given a diagnosis of FAE or ARND."

Statistics

There are no official statistics regarding FASD (as of 2004). Health Canada estimates:

- at least one child is born in Canada with FASD every day.[13]
- one to three babies in every 1,000 born in Canada are affected by FASD.[14]

Characteristics of persons with FASD[15]

"Prenatal exposure to alcohol can cause:

- facial abnormalities
- growth deficiencies
- damage to the central nervous system, which can result in:
  - developmental delays
  - intellectual deficits and learning disabilities
  - hyperactivity
  - attention and/or memory deficits
  - inability to manage anger
  - difficulties with problem solving
  - skull and brain malformation
  - neurological abnormalities."

Secondary disabilities[16]

"Adults with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD) face serious challenges because of physical, cognitive and behavioural deficits. The interaction of behavioural and mental health problems with adverse environments leads to further problems, such as trouble with the law, called 'secondary disabilities.'" Further examples of secondary disabilities follow:

- mental health problems
- disrupted school experience (suspension, expulsion or dropping out)
- trouble with the law (in trouble with authorities, charged or convicted of a crime)
- confinement (in-patient treatment for mental health or drug/alcohol problems or incarceration for a crime)
- inappropriate sexual behaviour
- alcohol or drug problems
- problems with employment, dependent living and parenting.

Suggestions for dealing with clients with FASD

Consider the following suggestions for dealing with these clients:[17]

- Use a directive, action-oriented, situationally-based approach.
- Model the behaviours you expect your client to demonstrate. (e.g. be calm and focused).
- Encourage appropriate medical treatment of any underlying attention disorder. For example, Attention Deficit Disorder can be effectively treated through prescription medication.
- Refer, as appropriate, for assistance in addressing substance abuse and/or personality disorders.
- Provide a high degree of structure.
- Contact your local provincial or territorial substance abuse office for information regarding FASD support organizations.

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (AD/HD) "is considered to be a neurobiological disability that interferes with a person's ability to sustain attention or focus on a task and to control impulsive behaviour....Current research has shown that AD/HD is caused by a deficiency of specific neurotransmitters in a specific set of brain circuits. Depending on which areas of these circuits are involved, the person may be distractive, impulsive or hyperactive...Genetics may play a part. AD/HD is likely to run in families and seems to be passed down through the generations...."[18]

"AD/HD is not a learning disability (LD). Each is a distinctive neurologically-based disorder. Each is recognized and diagnosed differently. And each is treated in a different way. The treatment for AD/HD will not correct LD. The treatment for LD will not help AD/HD."[19]

Statistics[20]

- 3 to 5 per cent of the children in Canada have AD/HD (2005)
- boys are affected by AD/HD two to four times more often than girls
- up to 67 per cent of people who had AD/HD as children may continue to have symptoms as adults
- 30 to 40 per cent of people with LD also have AD/HD

Characteristics of persons with AD/HD

Greater public awareness has encouraged more adults to seek evaluation and treatment for AD/HD and its associated symptoms. A partial listing of the current (2005) diagnostic criteria for AD/HD (according to the most recent DSM–IV) includes six or more of the following symptoms persisting for at least six months to a degree that is chronic and inconsistent with development level:[21]

- fails to pay close attention to details or makes careless mistakes at work
- fidgets with hands or feet or squirms in seat
- has difficulty sustaining attention in tasks or fun activities
- leaves seat in situations where staying seated is expected
- does not seem to listen when spoken to directly
- feels restless
- doesn't follow through on instructions and fails to finish work
- has difficulty organizing tasks and activities
- avoids, dislikes or is reluctant to engage in work that requires sustained mental effort.

It is important to note that there are also positive attributes associated with individuals who have been diagnosed with AD/HD. People with AD/HD "are often highly creative, and can show strong leadership skills. They are compassionate and/or empathetic with others—good at relating to younger children, elderly people and marginalized groups. At times, they may be able to hyperfocus and show great 'stick-to-it-ness.' They are intuitive/perceptive and have a powerful drive to move ahead."[22]

The impact of AD/HD on work and life

Adults with AD/HD may want to:[23]

- choose a place of employment or type of work that maximizes strengths and minimizes weaknesses
- disclose AD/HD in order to receive job accommodations tailored to specific needs.

The following additional suggestions for managing AD/HD may be helpful to clients:[24]

- Choose a healthy lifestyle including plenty of rest, exercise, balanced diet and structured routine.
- Use lists, day planners and files to organize activities.
- Break large chores into smaller, easier-to-handle tasks.
- Build in rewards for completed tasks.
- When activities aren't working, get help in determining why and identifying a bypass strategy.
- Learn about and understand AD/HD.
- Keep your sense of humour.

Nonverbal learning disorders

Nonverbal learning disorder (NLD) "is a neurological disorder which originates in the right hemisphere of the brain. Reception of nonverbal or performance-based information governed by this hemisphere is impaired in varying degrees, causing problems with visual-spatial, intuitive, organizational, evaluative, and holistic processing functions."[25]

Characteristics

The syndrome of NLD consists of specific assets and deficits. The assets include:[26]

- early speech and vocabulary development
- remarkable rote memory skills
- attention to detail
- early development of reading skills and excellent spelling skills
- eloquent verbal ability
- strong auditory retention.

Some deficits related to NLD are included in three categories:[27]

- Motoric: lack of co-ordination, problems with balance and graphomotor skills
- Visual-spatial-organizational: lack of image, poor visual recall, faulty spatial perceptions and difficulty with spatial relations
- Social: inability to comprehend nonverbal communications, difficulty adjusting to transitions and novel situations and deficits in social judgment.

Positive interventions for clients with NLD

Some interventions that may be helpful for clients with NLD follow:[28]

- clearly stated expectations
- computer use
- consistent scheduling
- facilitated group activity
- mentoring
- logical explanations for change
- organizational skills coaching
- social skills training
- verbal explanation of visual material.

Learning disabilities and education

As a result of the diagnostic and remedial services offered to children with learning disabilities since the mid-70s, there is a growing number of adults with learning disabilities with complete, or almost complete, secondary school credentials. While young adults with learning disabilities are, typically, less likely than their peers to attend post-secondary institutions, the numbers of those attending are rising.[29]

At the same time, many young adults with learning disabilities have not succeeded within the education system. As noted in the statistics provided in the introduction, this group includes school dropouts and young offenders.

There are still many adults with learning disabilities who may have passed through or left the education system before special programs were in place to help them deal with their disabilities and, as a result, are inadequately trained. These adults tend to be vulnerable in the labour market. Many of them are undiagnosed and, although they are likely aware of their difficulties, they are also unable to identify the cause.[30] Many of these adults are represented in literacy and basic education programs.[31]

Living with a learning disability

The social side

The secondary reactions to living with a learning disability can sometimes be more difficult to deal with than the disability itself. Pearl and Donahue[32] provide the following information regarding peer relationships and children with learning disabilities. Many, but not all:

- differ from their typical peers in some areas of social competence
- are not held in as high regard as others by their peers.

The Learning Disabilities Association of Canada (LDAC)[33] identifies that many children with learning disabilities are unable to read social cues effectively. As such, they may be labelled as being social misfits, loners or as having behavioural problems. The LDAC advocates actively teaching these children social skills that will be of great benefit to them, not only socially but also academically and in employment.

Difficulties with social interactions appear to continue into adult life, since many adults with learning disabilities report they are unhappy with their social lives, have difficulty making and keeping friends, do not participate in social, community or recreational events and, generally, have limited social contacts.[34]

Implications for emotional health

Butler states that "adults with LD may be at risk for serious emotional health problems."[35] They often report experiencing high levels of distress, anxiety, depression and frustration, along with feelings of failure and helplessness.

Living with frustration

People living with learning disabilities not only have to deal with functional limitations but also may have to "prove" their disabilities, which are essentially invisible. Anger can also grow when they are expected to perform in situations that don't reflect their true abilities.[36]

Assumptions regarding intelligence

"One of the most pervasive and damaging assumptions a person with learning disabilities may face at school or at work is that learning disabilities are linked to low intelligence. Key individuals such as parents, teachers, counsellors and eventually, employers, may impede the personal, academic and career development of persons with learning disabilities if the nature and impact of learning disabilities are not understood."[37]

Lower career aspirations

Persons with learning disabilities may have lower career aspirations than their peers even though they have the skills and potential to succeed. Rojewski cited in Butler[38] found that males with learning disabilities were twice as likely as their peers to seek low-prestige occupations and that females with learning disabilities also had proportionally lower occupational aspirations than their peers. "Implications are that students with learning disabilities who hold low perceptions of self-efficacy may not feel confident enough to pursue careers, even when they have the skills, attitudes and abilities necessary to succeed."[39]

Related to the lower career aspirations is the finding that adults with learning disabilities are as likely to be employed as their peers, but they generally tend to work in lower skilled occupations and to make less money.[40]

However, there is positive news regarding persons with learning disabilities who complete post-secondary education. Madaus et al.[41] report employment rates comparable to their peers and that exceed peers who have not completed post-secondary training. In addition, the reported salaries of post-secondary graduates with learning disabilities exceed reported salaries of adults with learning disabilities who are not graduates of post-secondary programs.

Responding to Challenges: Strategies and Practices

In general, the counsellor's task is to help clients with learning disabilities increase their chances for gaining and maintaining satisfying work by helping them to:

- identify their strengths and special skills
- identify their preferred future, including preferred work choices
- recognize their disabilities, if they do not already
- understand their disabilities and how they might affect work situations
- identify any coping strategies they have developed to address challenges they face at work
- identify appropriate assistive devices and additional strategies to address work challenges
- make attainable work choices that relate to their preferred future.

Regarding learning disabilities and assessment...

"Trust your intuition. If you think it (learning disability) is there, it quite likely is. Diagnosis is really important. For many adults, diagnosis is a huge relief."

Brian Mader
Alberta Human Resources
and Employment

Assessment: The key to identifying learning disabilities

Helping clients identify and build on their strengths is a basic element underlying effective counselling practice. In conjunction with recognizing and building on their strengths, clients with learning disabilities benefit from becoming aware of and acknowledging their disabilities and the difficulties and performance issues that are related to them. This, in turn, allows them to plan strategies to get around such difficulties. An important first step in that process is having a professional assessment completed.

"The most important starting point is becoming fully aware of the nature and severity of one's learning disability and what role it plays at work, at home, or in school. At the same time it is important not to assume that all difficulties one may be experiencing are due to a learning disability—most people, with or without learning disabilities, often face daily challenges that at times seem overwhelming. "[42]

Benefits of assessment

There are many benefits to having an assessment completed for clients with learning disabilities:[43]

- a sense of relief and reassurance when a cause of their difficulties is identified
- identifying a profile of specific strengths and challenges related to learning disabilities lays a base for effective interventions
- determining eligibility for related funding, programming, training and testing accommodations
- shifting the focus to identifying effective strategies to address difficulties rather than hiding the problems
- discovering and identifying unexpected strengths and talents that have been unrecognized or undervalued.

Diagnosis of suspected learning disabilities

The Adult Learning Development Association (ALDA) provides the following information regarding diagnosis of learning disabilities:[44]

"Learning disabilities should be formally diagnosed by a registered psychologist with advanced training in the learning disabilities field. The diagnosis is based on information collected during a comprehensive psychoeducational assessment.

The main purpose of the assessment is to determine the specific nature and extent of academic difficulties (e.g. dyslexia), and to identify, as closely as possible, a specific brain mechanism that is responsible for these difficulties (e.g. phonological processing).

A valid learning disability assessment should include the following:

- medical history (e.g. head injuries; exposure to environmental toxins)
- developmental history (e.g. onset of developmental milestones such as walking and talking)
- education history (e.g. school grades; type of remedial instruction provided)
- performance on measures of specific mental processes (e.g. auditory discrimination)
- performance on measures of academic achievement (e.g. reading comprehension).

The assessment also needs to take into account the fact that most adults have been out of school for years, and in many cases never received adequate schooling in the first place. This is one reason why assessing adult learning disabilities is much more challenging than assessing school-aged learning problems."

For information regarding referrals for assessment, counsellors can consult the local learning disabilities association in their area or the national office of the Learning Disabilities Association of Canada. It is important to ensure that the assessment is completed by a professional experienced in dealing with the age group in which the client falls. For example, some psychologists who have worked extensively with children with learning disabilities may have very limited experience working with adults with learning disabilities.

Tips for working with clients with learning disabilities

The following tips from a variety of experts in the field of learning disabilities share some common themes:

- use clear communication
- use a step-by-step approach
- provide structure
- describe the details.

Counsellors are encouraged to share the following information with employers and co-workers of persons with learning disabilities. It may be a valuable resource in assisting them to interact more effectively with employees/co-workers with learning disabilities.[45]

> *"Generally, clients with learning disabilities are long-term unemployed and are disenchanted. It is important to address that disenchantment by including activities to build self-esteem, self-enhancement and self-confidence as well as specific skills related to employment."*
> Dr. R. Gall
> Champions Career Centre

Interacting with clients with learning disabilities

Experts in the field continue to value the following suggestions regarding effective client interactions:[46]

- Keep background noise to a minimum. Meet in a room with a door, if possible.
- Provide a structure for your meeting and for each step in the counselling process. (A client with a learning disability often does not know where to begin.)
- Speak clearly in a normal tone of voice. Be direct and specific. Divide what you have to say into small sections and pause between sections.
- Repeat what you have to say or express it in a simpler vocabulary if clients have trouble understanding.
- Ask clients how they would prefer to receive information from you (e.g. in writing, in person, over the phone or all three). Consider taping meetings so clients can review them at home.
- Check often with clients for understanding. Have them repeat information back to you to confirm their understanding.
- Use as many modalities as possible when meeting with clients: tell clients, show clients and, if possible, let them practice what you are telling them.
- Be patient.

- Convey belief in clients. Encouragement is particularly vital to clients with a learning disability. Let them know that you understand the impact of their disability and, at the same time, believe they can succeed.

Use of plain language

Plain language is just that—language appropriate to the level of the reader, straightforward and without jargon. It is "clear, concise, and well-organized."[47] Use of the term "plain language" usually refers to written text. Experts in the field[48] encourage the use of plain language, both written and verbal, when communicating with persons with learning disabilities.

Helping clients with time management

Persons with learning disabilities may benefit from help with time management. Some may lack the self-monitoring skills to recognize their limitations in this area. The following suggestions[49] have proven to be helpful, particularly with regard to career planning and job search:

- List in detail all the steps to be taken in the job search process.
- Set dates for the completion of each agreed upon step.
- Prioritize steps to be undertaken—what must be done first, second and third, etc. (Be patient. Clients may need several tries at properly sequencing lists.)
- Transfer prioritized information to a large laminated seasonal calendar in the counsellor's office.
- Transfer the same information into a "week-at-a-glance" style daytimer.
- Encourage clients to keep the corrected prioritized list in a safe place, for example, filed at home.
- Review weekly (or at each meeting) the steps for the upcoming week and break these down into further detail as required.
- Schedule each detailed step into a fixed day and time.
- Use a system of audio tapes to record their schedules for clients who have difficulty with reading and/or writing.

Accommodating clients with learning disabilities

Mulhern and Rattan offer the following ideas for accommodating clients with learning disabilities:[50]

- Help clients become hyperorganized to address memory and learning challenges.
- Encourage clients to complete one task, uninterrupted, before starting another task.
- Encourage clients to develop step-by-step checklists that they can follow to complete tasks.
- Ask clients if they use/own watches, alarm clocks, calendars, daytimers. Help them access and learn to use these tools.
- Help clients access recording devices to tape sessions as memory aids.

Better yet…

Help clients access personal organizers with voice recognition and speech output capabilities. Such adaptive technology allows them to record, store and convert verbal information to a text format on a computer.

> *"There is no one book or piece of advice on how to help a person with a learning disability. Our experience demonstrates that clinical knowledge mixed with creativity and patience are the most important tools we need when working with our clients. The unique and talented individuals we work with continue to show the infinite options available to people with multiple challenges."*
>
> Sheila Mulhern and Peter Rattan
> Career Counsellors, Adult Learning Disabilities Employment Resources[51]

The career-building process

The counsellor's challenge is to help clients understand their strengths and their disabilities in relationship to the employment options they may be considering and/or help them assess their strengths and limitations and then identify and explore employment options.

Tips from the field

The following tips offered by an experienced practitioner provide helpful suggestions for working with clients with learning disabilities:[52]

- When interviewing clients, ask them about their whole life, from birth to present. Pay attention to education experiences, medical background and social experiences.
- If possible, involve significant people in clients' lives in the process, including partners, family members, employers and co-workers. This provides a broader perspective of issues and demonstrates a collaborative, co-operative approach.
- Gather all available documentation regarding clients. Everyone comes with a history, and getting to know it helps counsellors understand the developmental perspective.
- Remember, learning disabilities are forever. They don't go away. Help clients identify their strengths. To understand and help clients build on their strengths, counsellors must take the time to get to know clients.
- Use questions to identify what accommodations clients have developed on their own. For example, "What is working for you now?" and "How do you manage your work/daily life?"
- Continue to use a basic career counselling process and adapt it accordingly. For example:
  - Arrange for job tryouts for clients.
  - Collaborate with employers to identify specific work clients might be responsible for, identify impact of learning disability, strategize ways to maximize strengths and minimize weaknesses through accommodations.
  - Explore re-working/trading job duties to accommodate the client and co-workers. Always look for the win-win.

Exploring options

- *discuss hopes and dreams*
- *never make assumptions*
- *outline skills and abilities*
- *think about limitations and solutions to problems*
- *explore interests*
- *talk about work the client is interested in and/or discuss general employment information (e.g. jobs available, training required, etc.)*
- *use skills and interests to point to job possibilities*

Helping clients develop strategic employment action plans

Reekie[53] discusses the process of creating and implementing employment action plans with clients with learning disabilities. He identifies the quality of the client's belief system as a critical factor in determining the success of the plan. Based on the concept of "learned helplessness" originated by Seligman,[54] Reekie acknowledges that when clients experience outcomes to be unrelated to their actions, they learn that they are helpless. On the other hand, competent clients acknowledge the challenges their disability presents and the barriers they face in gaining employment and achieving promotions and attribute their successes and failures to the effort they invested. Reekie identifies in detail counsellor behaviours that facilitate effective employment action planning. A summary follows:

- Transform information for clients: identify specific tasks, create logical steps, streamline steps and create a memory device to cue steps.
- Never exceed seven as the maximum number of sub-steps for any one step.
- Begin each step with an action verb.
- Describe and model each strategy, talking aloud as you model.
- Coach clients in each step and provide feedback to clients on their performance.
- Ensure feedback is specific with regard to correct execution and specific suggestions for improvement.

- Have clients practise and master each step separately prior to combining and performing the entire sequence of steps.
- Have clients practise appropriate social behaviours for each strategy.
- Complete all practise in the counselling setting.
- Involve clients in group sessions of modelling and practice whenever possible.
- Ensure support strategies are in place for clients, for example, parents of younger clients, group members, etc.
- Emphasize mastery of performance and client responsibility for performance.
- Facilitate client learning of prerequisite skills, for example, computer skills.
- Teach optimistic self-talk and help clients positively reframe pessimistic self-talk.
- Present errors as an opportunity to learn positive problem solving. This helps clients develop optimism and confidence facing setbacks.

Helping clients with the work search process

Persons with learning disabilities often require a number of special considerations as they undertake the work search process. Many of the suggestions provided by Reekie will be helpful. In addition consider the information that follows.

Disclosing a learning disability: A client decision

Many persons with learning disabilities lack information regarding their disability. They do not self-disclose and self-advocate and, consequently, do not take advantage of reasonable accommodations.[55]

York University[56] shares the following information regarding disclosure of learning disabilities to employers.

"People with learning disabilities are often reluctant to disclose. They are concerned that disclosure may limit job prospects or advancement opportunities due to misconceptions, stereotypes or generalizations. Job seekers with learning disabilities are also concerned that they may be offered a 'token position' to fill an employment equity target and they would rather be hired for their abilities, not their disabilities.

There are persons with LDs who do not need to disclose because they have implemented personal strategies and accommodations to compensate for their idiosyncratic learning styles. However, there are others who have no choice but to disclose in order to pass employment entrance tests, complete job advancement courses, or complete assigned work within narrowly established parameters. Many would be able to perform more efficiently on the job if they were able to arrange for some simple accommodations such as a quieter workspace, access to a computer, or instructions in alternative formats.

...Ultimately, the choice to disclose rests with the individual with LDs who must evaluate each situation based on thorough research of diverse factors that include personal needs, job description, possible accommodations required during or after the selection process, and the organization's sensitization to disability issues."

About disclosure

"The acceptance of having a learning disability is a process. For clients, talking about or disclosing a learning disability is part of that process, as it evokes their feelings related to having a learning disability. Talking about their learning disability is a skill and counsellors can help clients practise this skill. Of the clients with learning disabilities that I have worked with, the most successful in the workplace have figured out a way to talk about their learning disability in a positive way. They have been able to build allies and elicit support by talking about what they can do. It's important to remind clients that an employer will hire you for what you can do, not what you can't do."

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Considering the consequences of disclosure

Further, regarding the issue of disclosure, Young makes the following comments.[57]

"Perhaps the more important question an individual with learning disabilities must ask is not whether to tell or not to tell, but rather the consequences of not telling. Can the person with learning disabilities do the job or derive benefit from a post-secondary educational program without accommodations? If the answer is no, the individual with learning disabilities (the parent, advocate, etc.) needs to consider the following:

- How severe is the learning disability?
- How much does the nature or manifestation of the disability conflict with the needs of the job or educational program?
- How open is the employer or educational program to recognizing and accommodating individuals with learning disabilities?
- If there is a union in the workplace, what is its position toward and willingness to support members with learning disabilities?"

Some suggestions for effective disclosure

It is helpful to remember that if clients wish to have accommodations made on the job, disclosure will be necessary. Also relevant is the fact that talking about the disability in an interview or on an application form can shift the focus from the abilities to disabilities.

The following suggestions[58] regarding disclosing information about learning disabilities to prospective employers continue to be valuable. Suggest to clients that they:

- not use medical terms but describe their disability by its job-related outcomes (e.g. I have difficulty following written instructions but no trouble at all following verbal directions.)
- have a current assessment of their disabilities with recommendations of how they may be accommodated on the job
- know and state their strengths
- know their needs in relation to the job
- look for support and networking opportunities in the workplace
- understand the role of the union, if applicable
- understand that asking for accommodations is a reasonable request.

The Learning Disabilities Association of Canada[59] provides a useful discussion regarding the advantages and disadvantages of disclosing learning disabilities at various points related to an interview. Overall, "disclosing a learning disability requires a lot of thought and planning. Persons with learning disabilities should carefully plan how they wish to disclose and know the implications of this action. Employees and/or candidates may first want to reveal a little bit of information at a time in order to establish a level of comfort and trust. Ultimately, the candidate must decide the time, the place and the degree of information to share with others."[60]

Further information regarding the work search process

Finding the right work

The "right" work for all clients is work that relates to their preferred futures and, at the same time, allows them to maximize their potential. Some of the following considerations may be useful regarding helping clients with learning disabilities find the right work:

- Encourage clients to obtain a written role description, if possible.
- Encourage clients to understand all aspects of the job they are considering, to analyse the tasks involved, to identify how their skills and strengths will be assets in the position and to anticipate possible challenges and identify strategies to address those challenges. For example, does the job demand typing, writing, driving, speed, memorization, etc. and how will the client handle those requirements?
- Encourage clients to research the working environment. Someone with visual motor problems might be uncomfortable working in a cluttered area. A person with an auditory perceptual problem may choose to avoid situations with a high background noise level.
- Governments and the corporations who do business with them and other large companies may be preferred employers for some clients because they are usually required to have employment equity programs.
- Help clients find out as much as possible about organizations they are considering for employment. Have they hired employees with disabilities before? Is there tolerance for non-conformity? A high turnover?

Applying for the job

The following suggestions may assist in helping clients apply for jobs:

- Help clients develop a résumé and encourage them to use it as an alternative to application forms whenever possible.
- Clients that have difficulty reading or writing can request that application forms be mailed so that they can receive help completing the form. Clients can also pick up application forms to be completed later.
- If an application form must be filled out at the workplace, help clients complete a standard application form to carry with them so that the information can be copied onto the employers' forms. Another option is to help clients list all pertinent information clearly on a sheet of paper that they can then copy on the employers' form.
- Help clients learn the meaning and spelling of words commonly used on application forms.
- Encourage clients who can read and write with some confidence to take extra care in completing applications to avoid making errors. An erasable black fine-tip pen, an eraser and whiteout for making corrections are useful tools. A small ruler and a spelling dictionary are also useful.
- Help clients practise following the directions on a variety of application forms so that they get used to following the instructions.
- Suggest to clients that they simply leave a dash in answer to questions that don't apply to them. Remind them that sometimes it's better to leave a blank space rather than an answer that could be easily misunderstood or could cost them the interview. Remind clients that they may have an opportunity to address such questions in an interview.

Preparing for the interview

The following suggestions may be helpful in assisting clients to prepare for interviews:

- Practise role-playing job interviews with clients, using recording devices, if possible.
- Discuss with clients whether or not they might disclose their learning disability at the interview.
- For clients anticipating disclosing their learning disability at an interview, help them practise talking about their disability.
- Help clients understand and meet appropriate standards of grooming and dress.
- Confirm with clients that they know the exact name, address and phone number of the company, the date and time of the interview, the time necessary to leave home in order to reach the interview at least ten minutes early, how to get there, the route to take to get there, where to park (if applicable) and the person to ask for.

Factors contributing to success in life and work

"People with learning disabilities are succeeding in school and at work in increasing numbers."[61] A variety of factors have been identified that contribute to this success and a number are discussed below.

Learned creativity

Gerber as cited in Greene-Black,[62] identifies "learned creativity" as a critical factor in predicting employment success. Morris, also cited in Greene-Black states, "If you could survive childhood, dyslexia was a pretty good business boot camp. It fostered risk taking, problem solving, and resilience. School was a chess game that required tactical brilliance."[63]

Control

Successful persons with learning disabilities seek and gain control of their lives and related issues. Their pursuit of control is related to their desire to succeed, their goal orientation and their reframing of the experience of having a learning disability into a more positive experience.[64] According to Gerber, as cited in Butler,[65] the process of reframing includes:

- "recognizing one's disability
- understanding one's own strengths and weaknesses
- acceptance
- setting a plan of action toward reaching goals.

Reframing is critical because the key problem adults with learning disabilities face is not the disability itself but, rather, their inability to confront the various challenges they encounter as they learn to live with and overcome it."

Self-determination and self-regulation

Another aspect relating to control includes the drive for self-determination. For persons with learning disabilities, this includes developing personally adaptive approaches to meet the demands of their environment both in the community and at work. Counsellors can assist in this process by promoting self-awareness and self-understanding for these clients.[66]

Use of compensatory strategies

Using compensatory strategies "involves utilizing individual strengths to bypass a particular weakness… for example, using checklists to compensate for poor memory."[67] Success for persons with learning disabilities is related to their ability to develop such compensatory strategies.[68]

Completion of post-secondary programs

Increasing numbers of persons with learning disabilities are completing post-secondary programs. Many post-secondary institutions provide specific programs to support students with various disabilities.[69] Persons with learning disabilities who complete post-secondary programs, in general, report earning higher salaries and enjoying higher rates of satisfaction with their work than non-graduates with learning disabilities.[70]

Helping clients compensate for learning disabilities at work

Many strategies have been identified to help clients compensate for their learning disabilities. Experienced practitioners stress the importance of tailoring strategies to individual clients. Every client is different and suggested strategies are most effective when they are fine-tuned to address the specific needs of individual clients.[71]

The following suggestions[72] regarding compensating for learning disabilities in the workplace continue to be useful. It may also be helpful to pass this information on to employers.

If clients

- **make careless mistakes:** Encourage clients to ask supervisors to review the steps of a job with them, then watch them complete tasks several times to determine the reason for carelessness and to examine alternatives. For example, if carelessness appears due to a cluttered work surface, organizing materials may help.
- **do not seem to listen:** Encourage clients to write down, or ask to have written down, important information in the simplest possible form.
- **make frequent errors:** Encourage clients to ask supervisors to monitor their work to determine the consistency of error types. Pacing of work rate might be different for clients with learning disabilities than for others. Clients might ask that a partner be assigned to them to help determine the error's origin. Work should only be undertaken on one area at a time.
- **have difficulty following written directions:** Encourage clients to ask that directions be recorded on tape and that diagrams be drawn to illustrate directions. Clients can also develop a code or symbol system to deal with written information.
- **have difficulty generalizing or transferring knowledge:** Encourage clients to review the original information format or process to determine similarities and what old information is applicable to the new situation. Clients could ask a supervisor to watch them practise the new process, reinforcing previously learned or acquired skills or information.
- **have time management difficulties on the job:** Encourage clients to ask to be paired with a partner to reinforce the schedule and work sequence. They could also ask that the time sequence of the task or schedule be illustrated or set out in a flow chart.
- **have short-term memory problems:** Suggest clients keep copious notes, written or tape recorded and clearly labelled with topic, persons involved, date, etc.
- **have eye–hand co-ordination problems:** Suggest that clients find time to practise skills when they are not under pressure and have a mentor or supervisor check their performance to ensure that they are practising correctly.
- **have visual perception problems:** Encourage clients to have a place for everything and to put everything in the proper place at all times.
- **have a short attention span:** Suggest they rotate several projects through the course of one day.

Developing a resource list of successfully employed persons with learning disabilities

Why not develop a roster of successfully employed persons with learning disabilities? These people will be valuable resources as:

- *role models for other clients with learning disabilities*
- *sources of ideas for career options for other clients with learning disabilities*
- *success stories for employers who are apprehensive about hiring persons with learning disabilities.*[73]

Success on the job: A checklist[74]

This checklist may be helpful to clients (consider making copies for them, as appropriate):

- Look neat and clean. Dress simply, the way others dress for the same job.
- Be on time, both arriving and leaving. Take only the time you are given for breaks.
- If you can't come to work, call. Your boss needs to know if you can't be there so that he or she can have someone else do your work that day.
- Do the work that has to be done. Every job includes tasks that are not particularly fun.
- Be prepared to spend extra time learning the job. If you are slower, be willing to take extra time to finish your share of the work.
- Ask for help as you need it. Even though other employees and supervisors may act impatient, it's better than making errors.
- On the other hand, don't ask for help if you don't need it.
- Take advantage of the "honeymoon" period—the first few days on the job when everyone expects you to ask questions. Some people like helping others. Try to find these people and ask them to watch you do the job correctly. Repeat the information they give you. Say, "Please listen to me tell you so I can be sure I understand." Don't let them interrupt you and tell you what to do. Be sure they are listening to you.
- Don't use a disability as an excuse for not trying to do your best, not getting along with others, not trying to control your behaviour or refusing responsibilities that you can handle.
- Offer to do tasks that you can handle but that are unpopular. Then, you'll feel more comfortable asking others for help with jobs you have trouble with.
- Develop ways of remembering the important things. Write them down. Say them aloud when you are alone. Ask your friends to test you.
- When you make mistakes, apologize and correct them immediately.
- Try hard and make the effort. Pay attention. Look everyone in the eye. Look at your work as you do it. Don't let your eyes or mind wander. Walk purposefully from place to place.
- Discuss your learning disability with those who need to know about it, ensuring you also discuss the strategies you use to address the difficulties it causes.
- Offer general information about learning disabilities to those who are interested.

Working with employers

Education is the key to helping employers see the benefit of hiring employees with learning disabilities. If employers hold misconceptions about learning disabilities, they will be more reluctant to hire or to make adjustments for clients.

Promoting a collaborative approach

Experts in the field promote collaboration among counsellors, clients and employers to facilitate successful work placement and performance. The following suggestions are provided to assist in working with employers:[75]

- Involve employers in sessions with clients as appropriate (e.g. to clarify work roles and expectations, misunderstandings, etc.)
- Involve employers and clients in discussions regarding developing strategies to compensate for and accommodate learning disabilities.
- Ensure discussions with clients and employers focus on client strengths and minimize disabilities by identifying appropriate strategies to address to disabilities.

- Encourage employers to allow clients with learning disabilities to participate in "job try-outs." This approach allows clients to check out particular types of work and employment settings and frees both the employer and clients from making a commitment without adequate information.
- Seize every opportunity to educate both employers and co-workers about learning disabilities. Share information from resources such as this one with them, as appropriate.

Some tips for employers

You may want to share the following suggestions[76] with employers who have had little or no experience in supervising employees with learning disabilities:

- Talk to persons with a learning disability as you would to anyone else. If they can't understand you, they will explain what you can do to make yourself understood.
- Offer to help when it's appropriate, but don't insist. If persons with learning disabilities need your help, they will tell you what will be most helpful.
- Don't assume that errors persons with a learning disability make are due to carelessness. Lateness, for example, may be caused by the disability. Discuss the problem calmly with them.
- Don't interpret a lack of response as rudeness. Persons with learning disabilities may react unconventionally or may appear to ignore you. The person may have a processing problem that affects social skills.
- Don't be disturbed if persons with learning disabilities appear to be staring at you or sitting/standing too close as you talk. They may be trying to read your lips or may be attempting to block out competing noise or they may not be aware of how close they are to you because of depth perception problems.
- Don't be concerned if persons with learning disabilities don't maintain eye contact or are easily distracted. Draw their attention back to the task at hand.
- If it takes persons with learning disabilities extra time to learn a certain skill, this doesn't necessarily mean they will perform the task poorly. Processing difficulties interfere with learning but not with doing the job once it has been learned.
- Employees with learning disabilities may need help organizing thoughts and tasks. Large projects may need to be broken down into many steps.
- Be direct when giving instructions. Say what you mean. Don't "hint" or use sarcasm.
- Help employees with learning disabilities learn the unwritten rules of your organization. Don't expect them to "pick them up." Explain them.
- Be understanding of their problems, but be firm about limits you set.
- Be especially thorough in orientations. Go over every rule and make sure employees with learning disabilities understand the process of a successful workday.

Worksite accommodations

Worksite accommodations can mean the difference between success and lack of success at work for persons with learning disabilities. "Accommodation means making sure that workplace policies, procedures and environments don't negatively impact upon employees."[77] Reasonable accommodations that clients might request of employers include the range of adjustments or adaptations that will render the workplace or job more suitable to the needs and abilities of workers with disabilities. For persons with learning disabilities, these may include:[78]

- flexible work assignments
- access to word processors, calculators, tape recorders
- voice recognition phones to permit dialing by voice
- automatic dialers for persons with sequencing problems
- timers to help recognize the time spent on various tasks
- scanners that scan printed text and read it out loud
- extended training periods
- distraction-free workplace
- the "buddy" systems with other employees
- written, demonstrated or taped instructions.

More information on job accommodations is available from JAN, the Job Accommodation Network. JAN is a source of ideas about methods and strategies for job accommodation.

Job accommodation example

An owner of a retail store wanted to promote an employee from a stock clerk to the position of cashier. However, the owner was concerned that the employee would not be able to perform the job due to a specific learning disability. The position involved operating a cash register and a bar code scanner. Each item was marked with both the price and a bar code. Most of the products were scanned into the register. However, sometimes the scanner would not work and the bar code numbers then had to be entered into the cash register by hand. The employee had difficulty with numbers and often reversed numbers in a series.

The owner agreed to allow the employee to try using an index card with a hole just large enough to allow one digit of the bar code to be displayed at a time. The employee could place the hole over the first digit of the bar code and then slide it along the numbers, thereby allowing her to enter one digit from the bar code into the cash register at a time and reducing the chance of reversal.[79]

A. E. Jacobs and D. J. Hendricks

Assistive technologies

The following information regarding assistive technology is provided by the Learning Disabilities Association of Canada.[80]

"Assistive technology means any item, piece of equipment, product or system, whether acquired commercially off the shelf, modified, or customized that directly assists, maintains, or improves functional capabilities of individuals with learning disabilities. The key to effective assistive technology is finding the right match between the problems, technological tool, and the implementation…

Individuals with learning disabilities often have difficulty with skills that others take for granted. Reading, listening, organizing information or writing skills may benefit from the use of assistive technology."

Examples

- Difficulties in handwriting/editing can be overcome with a computer with a good word processor (including a spell checker, grammar and style checker), editing or proofing help or using a note-taker. The visual appeal and speech ability of a computer program, combined with the adult typing or verbally giving responses, provides the multi-sensory dimension of learning that benefits adults with learning disabilities.
- Reading difficulties can be overcome with use of audio-recorded instructions, lectures and books, reader services and digital page scanners with speech ability to read back the scanned pages.
- Organizational difficulties can be overcome with electronic date books or day planners.
- Mathematics difficulties can be overcome with electronic calculators, graph paper or sample list of steps to follow.
- Devices may be high tech using sophisticated electronics or low tech such as sticky notes charts systems, calendars and checklists.[81]

Helping clients with educational issues

Upgrading, training and retraining may all be within the reach of clients with learning disabilities. Check with the adult education programs in your area. Many post-secondary institutions offer special services for students with learning disabilities that may include:[82]

- volunteers to tape-record books and edit written work
- access to appropriate technical aids
- information regarding assessments
- examination accommodation.

The National Educational Association of Disabled Students provides information regarding services and programs available to students with learning disabilities at Canadian post-secondary institutions.

Legislation and learning disabilities

Legislation at both the national and provincial levels protect persons with disabilities from discrimination. It will be helpful for counsellors to become familiar with basic information regarding such legislation.

Guarantee of equal rights

"Section 15 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (the Charter) guarantees equality rights, plus freedom from discrimination, for people who have a 'mental or physical disability'—as well as for other categories of people who face discrimination."[83]

Duty to accommodate

"The duty to accommodate refers to the legal obligation to take appropriate steps to eliminate discrimination resulting from a rule, practice or barrier that has—or can have—an adverse impact on individuals with disabilities. (A similar duty applies to other areas such as reasonable accommodation for religious differences.) Efforts to accommodate are required up to the point where the person or organization attempting to provide accommodation would suffer 'undue hardship' by doing so."[84]

The Learning Disabilities Association of Canada provides further information regarding persons with learning disabilities and related legislation.

In Conclusion

The number of success stories regarding persons with learning disabilities continues to grow. Successful persons with learning disabilities acknowledge and compensate for their disabilities. They take control of their own lives and are frequently very creative, particularly in developing compensatory strategies. They are able to reframe their experience of having a learning disability into a more positive experience. They extend this control and positive attitude into work environments where they are valued and make important contributions.

Counsellors have a role to play in helping clients with learning disabilities achieve success. Supporting clients to take control, encouraging them to tap into their own creativity to overcome challenges and helping them access available supports will be important elements in the career-building process.

Websites and Resource Organizations

Adult Learning Development Association (ALDA). Retrieved May 10, 2005, from **www.alda-bc.org**

- a not-for-profit charity serving adults who have learning disabilities and learning difficulties, providing direct services and referrals to other organizations
- offers general information about learning disabilities as well as a description of services including in-depth employment assistance and fee-for-service assessments, support groups and a newsletter

Calgary Learning Centre. Retrieved May 10, 2005, from **www.calgarylearningcentre.com**

- a not-for-profit, charitable organization with mandate to improve services for people with learning, literacy and attention difficulties across the lifespan
- provides services and programs for communities, organizations, families and individuals, including assessment, clinical services (psychologists, speech language specialists and special needs teachers), counselling, tutoring, workplace literacy and applied research

Council for Exceptional Children: Information Center on Disabilities and Gifted Education. Retrieved May 10, 2005, from **www.ericec.org**

- part of the National Library of Education, U.S. Department of Education
- provides professional literature, links to regulations and general information and resources related to the education and development of individuals who have disabilities and/or who are gifted

FASworld Canada. Retrieved May 12, 2005, from **www.fasworld.com**

- international alliance of parents and professionals whose mission is to create awareness regarding birth defects (Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorder (FASD)) caused by prenatal alcohol consumption
- key facts and statistics related to a collection of FAS disorders

Internet Resource for Special Children (IRSC). Retrieved May 10, 2005, from **www.irsc.org**

- information related to the needs of children with disabilities
- comprehensive collection of web links to resources related to learning disabilities (e.g. autism, mental health, communication, deaf and hearing impairment, art therapy, etc.)

Job Accommodation Network (JAN). Retrieved April 19, 2005, from **www.jan.wvu.edu**

- American-based information network and consulting resource for American employers needing information on accommodating persons with disabilities in the workplace

LD Online. Retrieved May 10, 2005, from **www.ldonline.org**

- interactive site for students, parents, teachers and other professionals
- features in-depth information and articles, the experiences of mentor teachers who have worked with students with specific learning disabilities, discussion forums and the latest research findings
- "Kidzone" includes artwork and stories by young people plus information to help students understand their learning disabilities and build self-advocacy skills
- includes an extensive list of Canadian and international organizations, in addition to those in the U.S., dedicated to learning disabilities

National Educational Association of Disabled Students (NEADS). Retrieved May 10, 2005, from **www.neads.ca**

- an on-line resource centre that includes a national directory of service providers for students with disabilities at Canadian post-secondary institutions
- advocates for full access to post-secondary education and employment
- provides information on services and programs for post-secondary students, a newsletter and research

Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities, Government of Alberta. Retrieved April 19, 2005, from **www.seniors.gov.ab.ca/css/premiers_council**

- aims to improve the lives of Albertans with disabilities where full citizenship is possible through personal, financial and learning supports and employment
- provides information on disability issues, human rights and government policy and a link to the Office for Disability Issues

The Learning Disabilities Association of Alberta (LDAA). Retrieved May 10, 2005, from www.ldaa.ca

- provides information and support for to enable Albertans with learning disabilities to develop their full potential
- works locally with parents, professionals and other concerned people through provincial chapters

The Learning Disabilities Association of Canada (LDAC). Retrieved August 9, 2005, from **www.ldac-taac.ca**

- a national voice for persons with learning disabilities and those who support them through collecting and disseminating information about learning disabilities
- provides in-depth research articles, links, a national newsletter, regulations and human rights and information about scholarships available for students

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CHAPTER 10

Persons With Low Income

WHATWORKS:

Career–building Strategies for People From Diverse Groups

Persons With Low Income

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Persons With Low Income

What do I wish I would have known when I first started working with persons with low income?

"I wish I would have had a better grasp of the complexity of their life issues. No one client walks in with one or two things. They have so many things happening that are extremely complex in depth and with layers intertwining. It is important to get to know clients as individuals before jumping into career planning activities, to explore some roots to their present situation, to identify presenting and pressing needs, to work on their agenda, not mine, to identify support systems (good and bad), to identify what their attitude is and how it will support (or defeat) working successfully and enjoyably."

Alberta Human Resources and Employment staff, Cold Lake/Bonnyville

Introduction

The term "low income" is a relative one. For the purposes of this chapter, the term "low income" is used to refer to the situation of persons who may or may not be employed and who, for various reasons, are in positions of not only limited financial resources, but also limited opportunity to share in the resources available to others. Low income may result in living below the poverty line whether individuals are working or are receiving income support.

Canada has no official definition of poverty. Different organizations use a variety of approaches and measures to determine at what level people are judged to be poor. Some of the working definitions of poverty follow:[1]

- Statistics Canada Low Income Cut-offs (LICO), calculated using both pre-and post-tax income
- Statistics Canada Low Income Measure (LIM)
- Fraser Institute poverty lines
- Market Basket Measure (MBM), a measure of low income developed by Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC) in consultation with the provinces and territories.

Low income cut-offs

"Although Canada has no official measure of poverty, the Statistics Canada measure [low income cut-off line] is probably the best known…Statistics Canada itself does not claim to measure poverty; rather, it defines a set of income cut-offs below which people may be said to live in *straitened circumstances*. Most social policy analysts, politicians and editorial writers treat the cut-offs as poverty lines."[2] Within this chapter the term "poverty" will be used to refer to a level of income below the cut-off line for low income.

"In calculating its low-income standard, Statistics Canada begins by estimating the percentage of gross income spent by the average Canadian family on food, clothing and shelter. It then somewhat arbitrarily marks this percentage up by 20 percentage points. This final percentage corresponds on average to a given household income level, and this level becomes the low income cut-off for that year."[3]

In establishing the cut-off for low income, Statistics Canada takes family size and community size into account. These additional considerations result in 35 separate low income cut-offs representing different family sizes in different communities, rural and urban. This approach to determining the level of income required to meet the needs of an individual or family demonstrates that the definition of poverty is relative rather than absolute.[4]

Market basket measure

"The market basket measure (MBM) is a measure of low income developed by Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC) in consultation with the provinces and territories. The estimated cost of a specific basket of goods and services is referred to as the MBM threshold, and it varies by province, community size and family type. People are considered to have low income if the family's *disposable* income is less than their MBM threshold."[5]

Community/Community Size	MBM Threshold (family of four)
Alberta rural	$24,509
Community, less than 30,000	$25,719
Community 30,000–99,999	$23,677
Edmonton	$23,571
Calgary	$24,180

Above are some examples reflecting the MBM threshold for various communities in Alberta.[6]

Statistics

The following Statistics Canada information reflects the percentage of the Canadian population within specific groups living below the cut-offs for low income in the year 2003:[7]

- 11.5 per cent of all persons
- 8.5 per cent of families
- 28.4 per cent of unattached males
- 30.5 per cent of unattached females.

The percentage of persons under 18 years of age living below the cut-offs for low income in the year 2003:

- 12.4 per cent of the total group
- 7.7 per cent of those living in two-parent families
- 40.9 per cent of those living in female lone-parent families.

The following are the average Canadian hourly wages of several categories of employees as of May 2005:[8]

- all persons 15 years and over: $18.88
- 15 to 24 years: $10.88
- 25 to 54 years: $20.58
- 55 years and over: $20.60
- men: $20.49
- women: $17.20
- full-time workers: $20.06
- part-time workers: $13.38

One in five men and one in three women are low paid (defined as earning less than two-thirds of the national median hourly wage or less that $11 per hour in today's (2004) dollars).[9]

General Characteristics

> *"When most Canadians think of poverty, the image is of sickly children on the edge of starvation. In highly industrialized societies, however, this scene is not typical. What prevails instead is deprivation and need. In Canada, people suffer deeply not because the necessities of life barely exist for the population at large—the state of affairs in many Third World countries—but because an unequal distribution of income blocks access to Canada's abundance. Poverty in this country is a matter not of starving, but rather of begging for food at food banks and shelters, and of being shunted from one substandard shelter arrangement to another. For an increasing number of people, it even means living on the street and panhandling. This dreary picture is the result of an unequal distribution of riches rather than a lack of riches."*[10]
>
> David P. Ross, Katherine J. Scott and Peter J. Smith
>
> *The Canadian Fact Book on Poverty 2000*

Working and/or receiving income support

Persons with low income may be:

- working part-time or full-time
- not working
- receiving income support and/or other benefits, such as health care

The common experience of these people is that of receiving a low income—in most cases, a lower income than they require to meet their day-to-day needs.

Income support

"Social assistance or welfare is the income program of last resort in Canada. It provides money to individuals and families whose resources are inadequate to meet their needs and who have exhausted other avenues of support."[11]

"Although people talk about welfare as a single entity, there are really 14 welfare systems in Canada: one system in each province and territory and yet another system for Aboriginal people who live on-reserve. Despite the fact that each is different, they have many common features. They all have complex rules which regulate all aspects of the system, including eligibility for assistance, the rates of assistance, the amounts of other income recipients are allowed to keep, and the way in which applicants and recipients may question decisions regarding their cases."[12]

In Alberta, the term "income support" is now used rather than "social assistance" and will be used throughout this chapter, except in direct quotations where an alternate term has been used.

Income support benefits and low income cut-offs

The National Council of Welfare regards the low income cut-offs as poverty lines and provides comparisons of income support benefits to low income cut-offs. While provincial and territorial governments may contend that income support benefits are intended to provide only the bare necessities of life and that the low income cut-offs are high enough to allow some discretionary spending, the Council offers a conflicting point of view, asserting "[t]he fact is that the cut-offs already represent very low levels of income. The only 'discretion' many welfare recipients have is how to cut back on food when the money starts running short toward the end of the month."[13]

The following are some examples of low income cut-offs for 2004 for single persons and families living in communities of various sizes:[14]

- Single person:
  - Community population 500,000+: $20,337
  - Community population 30,000 to 99,999: $17,407
  - Rural: $14,000
- Family of four:
  - Community population 500,000+: $37,791
  - Community population 30,000 to 99,999: $32,345
  - Rural: $26,015

The value of most provincial and territorial social assistance-related benefits continued to decline in 2004. Income support benefit rates in most provinces fall well below the low income cut-offs. Single employable persons tend to receive the least adequate benefits in all provinces. Examples of total welfare income for specific groups in particular provinces follow and are expressed as a percentage of the related low income cut-off.[15] (For each category, figures reflect highest and lowest percentages plus the Alberta figure, if not included otherwise.)

- Single employable:
  - Newfoundland: 42 per cent
  - Alberta: 25 per cent
  - New Brunswick: 19 per cent.
- Person with a disability:
  - Ontario: 59 per cent
  - Alberta and New Brunswick: 39 per cent.
- Single parent, one child:
  - Newfoundland and Labrador: 70 per cent
  - Alberta: 48 per cent.
- Two parents, two children:
  - Prince Edward Island: 65 per cent
  - Alberta: 51 per cent
  - British Columbia: 48 per cent

Note: The three territories are not included because they are excluded from the Statistics Canada survey used to generate the low income cut-offs.

The National Council of Welfare[16] also compares social allowance benefits to average incomes for the same groups in all provinces. As expected, the benefits fall far below the average incomes for each of the groups, again reinforcing the gap between the level of income received by social allowance recipients and average Canadians.

> *"Poverty is an important social issue because it affects the development prospects of children and adults. How a society distributes its income is a fundamental determinant of social cohesion. People left on the fringes economically also tend to be on the fringes socially. The many debilitating effects of poverty on child development and adult well-being are well documented."*[18]
>
> Canadian Council on Social Development
> The Canadian Fact Book
> on Poverty 2000: Highlights

Duration of income support

The length of time that people receive income support varies considerably. For some it is a temporary situation—the assistance they receive that tides them over until they find work and are able to move forward without requiring further assistance. Others with more complex situations and issues, who find maintaining employment a challenge, may require assistance over a much longer period.[17]

Poverty

Two aspects of poverty are important to consider: the depth and the duration. The depth of poverty refers to the how far below the poverty line (low income cut-off) a person's income is. The duration of poverty refers to the amount of time a person's income falls below the poverty line.

Depth of poverty[19]

- The average depth of poverty has increased dramatically. Between 1981 and 1997 there was an 86.4 per cent increase in the gap between average income of poor households and the poverty line.
- Working-age households have experienced the greatest increase in depth of poverty. For these households, the poverty gap increased more than 100 per cent between 1981 and 1997.

Duration of poverty[20]

- The duration of poverty varies for different groups. For approximately 60 per cent of people, poverty is a temporary situation; for the remaining 40 per cent, poverty is a recurrent problem.
- Certain groups are more likely to experience lengthy periods of poverty:
  - lone parents
  - persons with disabilities
  - members of visible minorities
  - recent immigrants
  - individuals with low levels of education
  - unattached individuals
- The longer a person remains in poverty, the more difficult it is to move out of poverty.

Children and poverty

- In Canada in 2003, Statistics Canada "estimated that 843,000 children under the age of 17—about 12.4 per cent of the total population in that age group—were living in low income families."[21]
- "A popular misconception is that poor children live mostly in families dependent on social assistance. The reality is that 57.9% of poor children in Alberta live in families where the parent(s) worked all year. That means there are 56,700 children (in Alberta in 2004) who, despite living in working families, are still living in poverty."[22]

> ***Poor children...***
>
> *"The statistics are especially striking for children—a segment of the population that is unequipped to overcome poverty by any efforts of its own. Income levels and the well-being of Canadian children are undeniably linked..."*[23]
>
> Canadian Council on Social Development
> The Canadian Fact Book on Poverty 2000

Some additional information about poverty:[24]

- More people are receiving low income. The rate of poverty as measured by Statistics Canada is growing.
- In 1997, young families, in which the oldest adult was under 25 years of age, had a 46.1 per cent chance of being poor.
- Lone parent mothers were at higher risk for poverty

with a rate of 56.0 per cent in 1997.

- Minority groups tend to face higher rates of poverty (from the 1996 Census):
  - Aboriginal peoples: 43.4 per cent
  - visible minorities: 35.9 per cent
  - persons with disabilities: 30.8 per cent.

Precarious jobs

"[P]recarious jobs—low-wage jobs that carry a high risk of termination—are a major cause of low family incomes and poverty. However, good jobs are also important to social inclusion in the wider sense of contributing to an individual's ability to develop talents and capacities, to participate actively in society and to enjoy a broad equality of life chances with fellow citizens. "Precarious work is a key challenge. . . because it condemns a significant proportion of citizens to lifelong exclusion from progressive job ladders and opportunities for skills development, and because these risks are concentrated among defined groups who face multiple sources of disadvantage, such as recent immigrants and lone parents. Precarious work is also highly gendered and undermines the goal of labour market equality between women and men…"[25]

Additional information regarding precarious jobs:[26]

- The average length of periods of unemployment in Canada is about four months.
- In recent years (2004), one in eight workers has been unemployed at least once in the year.
- The risk of unemployment is highest for those with lower levels of education who also tend to earn lower than average wages when employed.

Complex issues

Practitioners consistently emphasize the complexity of issues that persons with low income experience, including both systemic and personal circumstances. These include health issues, both physical and mental, parenting challenges, relationship difficulties, lower levels of education and experience, in some cases addictions issues and so on. Trying to address these complex issues with limited resources creates a very challenging situation for most.[27]

General challenges

Practitioners identify some of the challenges that persons with low income face in gaining employment:[28]

- sense of personal failure, low self-esteem and fear of trying again
- mental health issues
- transportation issues
- shortage of low-cost housing
- addictions
- child care
- lack of basic skills, low education and literacy level
- unstable work history
- single parenting; often very young parents.

> ***Complex issues...***
>
> *"There are so many issues that push people into poverty. For many, health issues are prevalent. Family support may be lacking—they may be geographically separated. And for some, a generational situation exists where a second generation now needs help."*
>
> Susan Watson, Edmonton Food Bank

Resilience

While persons with low income face complex issues and challenges, they also, in many cases, demonstrate a remarkable degree of resilience (the capacity to bounce back from adversity). "Persons with low income are some of the best money managers that I have ever met. A significant percentage are really able to stretch their dollars beyond what many can. They manage incredibly difficult situations and keep on going when many would give up."[29]

Financial Pressure

Numerous studies concur with Klein, Amundson and Borgen's finding that "the most prominent aspect of [social assistance recipients'] experience was the stress and tension they encountered due to financial hardship. This factor was mentioned almost three times as frequently as any other category. In addition to being repeatedly expressed as a source of tension, it also was seen to be a catalyst for other 'downward pulls' such as family friction, loss of self-esteem, inability to provide for family and feeling misunderstood by friends."[30]

Financial pressures for income-support recipients are distinct from pressures experienced by displaced middle- or high-income earners. Income-support recipients report enormous difficulty in meeting their families' basic survival needs such as food, clothing and shelter.[31] Lack of money for transportation and child care in order to look for work become major concerns.[32]

> *"We often meet people in crisis situations in their life. Their behaviours and concerns are not long-term focused, stress is high and their decision-making abilities are not at their best."*
> Alberta Human Resources and Employment staff, Cold Lake/Bonnyville

Health issues

Adults with low incomes tend to experience more health-related problems than those in higher income brackets. Low incomes do not cause these related health concerns. In fact, in some cases, health issues may be the cause of low incomes. In any case, there is no doubt that "low income is associated with a disproportionate number of special problems."[33]

Physical health

Health problems experienced by adults with low incomes include the following:[34]

- 20 per cent of poor adults report being in poor or only fair health.
- 55 per cent had two or more of the following chronic conditions compared with 32 per cent of middle-income and 13 per cent of high-income adults:
    - asthma
    - high blood pressure
    - stomach ulcers
    - effects of stroke.

Emotional health

Persons with low income tend to experience more difficulties related to emotional health than their counterparts with middle or high incomes. The experience of unemployment is marked by varying degrees of depression and characterized by:[36]

- continual struggle to meet survival needs
- pessimism about becoming employed
- low self-esteem
- negative feelings about being on welfare
- lack of significant or lasting positive emotional shifts.

> ***The social determinants of health***
>
> *The following social determinants interact with basic determinants of health, such as genetic endowment and the physical environment, to determine why some people are healthy and others are not.*
>
> 1. *Income inequality*
> 2. *Social inclusion and exclusion*
> 3. *Employment and job security*
> 4. *Working conditions*
> 5. *Contribution of the social economy*
> 6. *Early childhood care*
> 7. *Education*
> 8. *Food security*
> 9. *Housing*
>
> Public Health Agency of Canada[35]

Domestic violence

The experience of domestic abuse is an issue for persons with low income. In an American study[37] of long-term (36 months or longer) social assistance recipients, 79 per cent of respondents reported at least one incident of violence involving a spouse or partner. Twenty per cent reported at least one incident of violence within the preceding year. In the same study, 15.1 per cent of respondents met the DSM-IV (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual) criteria for a diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder and roughly one-half reported symptoms of depression.

Social support

A frequently cited experience of unemployed persons, including those receiving income support, is isolation and lack of social support. In this situation, social support is defined as the perception that a person is cared for, esteemed and valued and belongs to a network of communication and mutual obligation.[38]

Considerable research shows that social support can be an important resource in times of stress. Significant findings regarding isolation and social support for persons with low income include:

- Verbal support of family and friends may actually send contradictory messages if the legitimacy or importance of finding work is downplayed.[39]
- Positive support tends to be particularly important for older workers (those over 45), since they tend to become discouraged and drop out of the labour market.[40]
- Entire families of unemployed individuals often become isolated due to humiliation and loss of self-esteem.[41]
- Families may break up when the stress of unemployment becomes too unbearable.[42]

Social resources...

"People who have resources can pump each other up. Grandma can go and buy winter coats for the kids [that a parent can't afford]. Someone else can share the use of their car. And, that car will probably work, so that it doesn't break down or run out of gas on the way to the job interview."

Marjorie Bencz
Edmonton Food Bank

Level of education

"In the 10 years since 1993/94, job growth among those with post-secondary education has totalled 2.84 million. Over the same period, employment among high school graduates has grown by a little more than 555,000, while employment for those with less than a high school diploma has fallen by about 488,000. As a result, 55 per cent of all jobs in Canada were held by those with post-secondary education in 2003/04."[43]

Persons with low income tend to have achieved lower levels of education. This places them at higher risk both for unemployment and for employment in lower-wage jobs.

Average earnings for those employed full-time, full year, by education in 2001 follow:[44]

- less than Grade 9:
  - women: $20,555
  - men: $31,563
- high school graduate:
  - women: $28,945
  - men: $40,463
- non-university certificate or diploma:
  - women: $33,422
  - men: $47,935
- university graduate:
  - women: $52,223
  - men: $77,356

In addition, a statistic from Nova Scotia reflects that over half of single mothers in that province who require social assistance have less than a Grade 12 education.[45]

Perceived disincentives to work

Persons who receive income from government financial assistance programs may have the qualifications and the desire to work, but may fear jeopardizing their benefits if they take a full-time job. Considering that medical costs may also be included among their basic needs, many feel this is too big a risk to take. In addition, some fear losing benefits, not just because of the cost, but also because of the difficulty in getting benefits reinstated if the job does not last.

However, financial assistance programs in some provinces, including Alberta, have changed. Individuals receiving financial assistance are encouraged to maximize self-sufficiency (which for some means working). Individuals who are working while receiving financial assistance, may receive a supplement to their earnings (i.e. a portion of their wages may be exempt when their benefits are calculated). Also in Alberta, people leaving financial assistance for jobs may continue to receive health benefits both for themselves and their children.

So, while loss of health benefits may still be a concern for clients, it may not be a reality. Counsellors are encouraged to become familiar with financial assistance programs and help clients get more information about income exemptions and health coverage available to them before dismissing the idea of finding work.

Responding to Challenges: Strategies and Practices

> **Building on strength**
>
> *"Every day is a new day. It's important to focus on the positives and to see small successes. To us [practitioners], they may be small, but for them [clients] they are huge. Showing up clean and on time may be a big step. Keeping a job for one week or one month might be huge. It is important to look back at the person's history and where they've come from and where they are now, to see the success, the movement. Every person has an individual baseline to judge success from. We have to see every individual as unique and we can't have blanket expectations for everyone."*
>
> Tricia Haggarty
>
> Central Alberta Housing Society

Counsellor qualities

Qualities of effective counsellors tend to be similar across all client groups. Practitioners working with clients with low income, however, consistently identify the following qualities and approaches as critical in building trust and establishing and maintaining effective relationships with these individuals:[46]

- Be non-judgemental. Recognize that a combination of circumstances have brought clients to their current situation. Any person, given such circumstances, might end up in the same position.
- Be respectful. Value clients and their experiences.
- Stay positive. Help clients reframe experiences to identify the positive.
- Use a holistic approach. Help clients work through life issues as part of addressing employment issues.
- Be client-centred. Don't make assumptions. Ask clients what they need (and what they want *their* goals to be, not yours).[47]
- Be consistent. Continue to use this approach and demonstrate these qualities. Clients will begin to trust and will return when they experience this consistent approach.

Building on strength

Practitioners acknowledge that using a strength-based approach does not mean ignoring the challenges that clients face. An important part of the process of helping clients with low income is helping them identify challenges and strategies that might address those challenges.[48] A strength-based approach will effectively help clients identify strategies to address current challenges and move forward with career building.

> *"Keep trying to give ownership back to clients. When they come in, ask, 'What has brought you in?' This question provides information clarifying if someone has sent them and whether they are aware of why they are here. Give clients an overview of what is available: 'Here are the things that we can do here. Does it sound like any of these might work for you?' This question facilitates client buy-in. Try hard to keep giving it back to them; it is their decision."*
>
> Alberta Human Resources and Employment staff, Cold Lake/Bonnyville

Staying strength based and client focused

Current (2005) practitioners provide the following tips to help counsellors stay strength based and client focused:[49]

- Listen, listen, listen. Try to understand clients' worlds, the vastness of their journeys, the twists and turns their journeys have taken.
- Allow client direction for topics and work options. Keep giving the control and decision-making back to clients.
- Provide confirmation of clients' positive statements about abilities, dreams and values.
- Look for any motivating factors that "light them up (e.g. money to buy_____, time away from kids, role model for_____).

- Give hope, encourage dreams and help clients develop some roots for those dreams.
- Separate goals into short and long term. Work with small manageable steps.
- No matter how jaded you feel about clients' past or present situations, think positively and believe in their potential.
- Try the following, or similar, questions:
  - What has worked for you before?
  - What's happening right now?
  - What have you been thinking about as far as work goes?
  - If you could take pictures of your future, what would you like to see in those pictures?

Building on hope

"Acknowledge strengths and build on hope for the future. There is a human desire for the life of kids to be better. Even when coming from challenging circumstances, there is still hope and desire that for the kids, things will be better."[50]

Helping clients explore the role of hope in their lives can be a helpful strategy. Hope:[51]

- provides physiological and psychological benefits that impact communication and decision-making
- reduces anxiety about and fear of the future
- increases the likelihood of risking, keeping commitments and allowing exploration of alternative futures.

Some strategies to enhance hope for clients receiving income support include:[52]

- actively listening to peoples' stories and acknowledging their losses and challenges
- using hopeful language such as "yet," "when," "I believe." This language implies change is possible
- helping clients see the positives and find learning in their experiences
- helping clients explore alternative and hopeful possibilities.

Starting with the present

A consistent theme for working effectively with persons with low income is starting where the client is and helping them work from there. For many clients, this will include identifying and addressing present challenges before, or while, considering future employment options. Addressing current challenges helps clients lay a firm base for gaining and maintaining employment, a critical component of the career-building process.

Willingness to listen

"Address human aspects of why people are where they are rather than jumping directly into employment. It is important to maintain an ongoing recognition that what we (counsellors) perceive as failure to meet commitments to, for example, an employment plan, may be more about circumstances. That person wants to follow through, but circumstances get in the way. Try asking, 'What else is going on in your life right now?' or 'Is there anything else limiting your ability to follow through with this plan? What might that be?' It may be that child care or bus fare is getting in the way. They may be embarrassed about their lack of resources. Counsellors can help with their willingness to listen. Listening is key. Listen to [clients'] barriers to success and then try to help them address them."

Phil O'Hara

Edmonton Social Planning Council

Looking to the future

Acknowledging and addressing clients' present circumstances and related challenges is extremely important. At the same time, practitioners can emphasize the importance of looking to the future. Some related suggestions follow[53]:

- Take time to get to know clients and build a relationship with them.
- Plant seeds regarding clients' future vision while strategizing to address short- term needs.

- Ask clients what they want their future to look like. Use questions and prompts that are meaningful for each individual.
- Help clients identify how they might move in their preferred direction. While clients' hopes may seem unrealistic or unobtainable to counsellors, it is not the job of the counsellor to judge clients' visions or dash their hopes. Helping clients articulate how they might move towards their vision is an effective strategy that ensures the career-building process is client owned and client driven.
- Accept that a six-month vision may be as far ahead as clients can imagine, given their present circumstances.
- Accept that building a vision is a process and may happen a little bit at a time.
- Seize opportunities to work with young single parents who, with new babies, may be quite hopeful and particularly open to future thinking.

A multidisciplinary approach

Many clients present with multidimensional issues. No one counsellor or agency is likely to have the resources to help clients through their complex situations. Experts in the field suggest a multidisciplinary approach.[54]

A successful multidisciplinary approach requires that agencies work together to support clients and their movement forward. Some tips to make this approach work follow.[55]

With the client:

- Gather information including
  - What agencies are you connected with?
  - What are your goals?
  - How can we assist you?
- Following the regulations of the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIP) Act*, you may consider having clients sign permission forms that allow sharing of information with all collaborating agencies. Explain why you are collecting the information and how it will be used.

With the multidisciplinary team:

- Work from a strength-based approach.
- Check egos at the door and keep the clients' best interests as the focus.
- As a team, collaborate to support clients in moving forward toward their identified goals.

Facilitated referrals

Facilitating effective referrals requires broad knowledge of community resources. In some cases, services evolve and change within organizations and may not exactly match those advertised. It is important to maintain current information regarding community services.[56] Familiarity with personnel in resource organizations will be invaluable. Some practitioner suggestions for making facilitated referrals include:[57]

- taking time up front with clients to identify their needs
- asking clients what other agencies they are receiving services from
- knowing the resources available in your community and their special areas of service
- getting to know the people and their special areas of expertise in the agencies providing services
- ensuring clients get to the person in the agency who can provide the most effective help
- helping clients who "fall between the cracks" by
  - brainstorming with all agencies to identify who can provide the necessary services
  - encouraging agencies to be flexible regarding their mandates.

Support

"Many people could experience some of the challenges that drive people into poverty, for example, mental illness. Without sufficient support, a downward slide can happen very quickly. Peoples' savings are eaten away, and they have no further resources. Both financial and emotional support are so important."

Marjorie Bencz
Edmonton Food Bank

Counselling principles

Herr[58] outlines three broad principles still relevant in an approach to counselling persons who are underemployed or unemployed.

1. Understand, and help clients understand and anticipate, the psychological facets of unemployment, particularly the relationships between jobs, joblessness and mental health.

Herr notes a growing literature on the relationship between unemployment and economic uncertainty and psychological and health problems, low self-esteem and incidences of mental illness, family discord, and spouse and child abuse.

Herr recommends that counsellors help clients:

- develop an understanding of mental health that recognizes some problems as internal, but many, if not most, as provoked and sustained by external circumstances such as unemployment
- avoid blaming themselves for circumstances they can't control
- confront and cope with external factors.

2. Assist clients in examining the range of community resources available to them to avoid unemployment or during times of unemployment.

Clients need help to:

- see themselves as part of a social system, rather than isolated from it
- recognize the services and groups that can provide experience, skill development, livelihood and well-being
- become active, rather than reactive.

3. Recognize that those who experience unemployment are likely to need more than support.

Herr refers to the multiple problems of persons in this group:

- transportation
- racial discrimination
- lack of basic skills
- poor industrial discipline
- family discord
- drug or alcohol problems.

Counsellors may assist clients by:

- helping them understand the additive, interactive effects of these problems
- helping them gain access to information about skills training in these problem areas
- acting as advocates for them with employers, community groups and governmental bodies.

Helping clients with self-esteem issues

- Provide a long-term, supportive counselling relationship. This will enhance personal development and assist clients in moving towards self-sufficiency.[59]
- Use exercises that allow clients to explore their values, needs, aspirations, fears, preferences and relationships.[60]
- Help clients assess the positive and negative factors that affect them as a means of increasing their awareness and enabling them to focus on the positive factors.[61]
- Teach your clients the skill of positive reframing to promote positive thinking.[62]
- Help clients determine at least three things they are good at and write these as affirmations to be read daily. Reinforce the skill of positive reframing mentioned previously by showing them how to rephrase off-hand negative comments such as "How could I be so stupid?" into positive affirmations such as "I am in error, but I am smart."[63]
- Use your knowledge and your network to adequately inform and refer clients. This will eliminate clients' feelings of being shuffled back and forth from agency to agency, program to program. This shuffling quite often results in clients experiencing each of these incidents as a personal failure.[64]
- Help clients manage personal change and problem-solving, both of which can affect self-esteem, using the following techniques:[65]
    - relaxation training
    - systematic desensitization
    - assertiveness training
    - modelling
    - video role playing.

- Focus on helping your clients develop a better understanding of themselves. This will help them cope more effectively with negative feelings, feel more positive about themselves and facilitate their ability to create and pursue opportunities.[66]

Helping clients with motivation[67]

Assess clients' motivation. Why are they here to see you? Did they come of their own volition or because "the system" required them to? What activities do clients engage in on an average day? Who are clients in daily contact with?

Recognize competence in clients. Position yourself as one who reinforces clients' competence to enhance their motivation. Identify and resolve any barriers in your relationships with clients.

Determine if clients have an extrinsic or intrinsic locus of control. An extrinsic locus is related to outer-directed behaviour (i.e. behaviour driven by the expectations of others). An intrinsic locus is related to inner-directed behaviour (i.e. behaviour that is self-driven). It is important that clients take ownership in choosing their own goals (an example of an intrinsic locus of control), since these goals will be motivating only if they are truly their own.

Helping clients relate their goals to their vision is a critical part of the career-building process. Any goal that helps clients move towards their vision is relevant and meaningful. The counsellor's role involves helping clients define and implement their goals. Encourage clients to keep chosen goals realistic, achievable and motivating by showing clients how to break their goals into manageable steps (long- and short-term goals). Encourage clients to assess their goals, modify them as necessary and identify the steps they are taking to accomplish their goals. Some clients will take longer than others to complete the steps towards their goals but are likely to be motivated by counsellor support. Counsellors are encouraged to discuss any difficulties clients may be having with them.

Helping clients overcome isolation

A common characteristic for many persons with low income is a feeling of isolation and social exclusion. Group counselling is particularly effective with unemployed income-support recipients and helps to address their sense of isolation. Klein et al. found that joining an employment training course or program was the most positive critical incident reported by participants in their study.[68] Provide referrals for clients to a peer support group, if available. If an appropriate group does not exist, counsellors may consider the feasibility of establishing a group in their area. Such groups are particularly helpful for women.[69]

It will also be useful to help clients learn self-management skills that will help them build and maintain a social support network. Since the supportive messages most valued by unemployed persons come from peers in a similar situation, encourage clients to develop a personal network of peers.[70] Where possible, maintaining frequent and ongoing contact with clients helps to develop a trusting relationship.[71]

Building relationships with clients

Counsellors may experience the following barriers in relationships with clients who are income-support recipients:

- client's lack of trust in your relationship
- poor communication by either or both parties
- fears based on lack of information.

Counsellors can resolve these problems by:

- examining their attitudes and respecting individual differences
- communicating honestly and encouraging clients to do the same
- making any hidden agendas explicit.[72]

Helping clients with financial issues

It is important for counsellors to be aware of the financial situations of clients who are receiving low income, as well as the limitations this situation will impose, such as lack of funds for transportation, child care, work clothes, etc.[73] Some clients may be excellent money managers, having survived on extremely limited funds. At the same time, many benefit from financial planning information provided in either group or individual settings. Also important is information about dealing with the stress that arises from financial deprivation and the inability to provide necessities for one's family.[74]

Self-advocacy

An important role for counsellors includes helping clients to become self-advocates. Information can be a powerful tool and clients will benefit from an awareness of programs, services and benefits available to them and their children. As self-advocates, they are best able to access such benefits. As mentioned previously, it is important for counsellors to maintain current information regarding the variety of programs and services available to clients federally, provincially and within the community.[75]

Helping clients with self-management skills

Current practitioners[76] suggest that some persons with low income will benefit from self-management skills. Stonely[77] provides a list of skills that includes:

- attitude
- communication skills
- work ethics (behaviours)
- time management
- stress management.

Attitude

Use modelling, role play and an "outside exercise" (e.g. approaching or phoning someone for information while displaying either a good or bad attitude) as means of showing that attitude can affect their lives.

Communication skills

Help clients learn to:

- speak clearly
- listen and paraphrase actively
- use questioning skills appropriately
- use "I" statements, especially in potential conflict situations
- use summaries.

Work behaviours

Help clients appreciate the importance of the following, on the job:

- grooming, cleanliness and appearance
- punctuality
- basic work rights—may be augmented by procedure manuals from specific jobs
- respect for co-workers
- respect for company/employer.

Time management

Help clients become familiar with:

- using a daily/weekly planner
- making appointments
- documenting meetings, appointments, names, phone numbers, etc.

When clients find work, they may experience an apparent lack of time. Talk with them about using time management skills to deal with the work adjustment period.

Stress management

Help clients to:

- identify how stress will build up if not handled appropriately
- recognize and prevent burnout
- identify constant stress factors in life
- realize that because stress is ongoing, stress release must also be ongoing
- find a positive form of stress release that works for them.

Helping clients with education and training

Education and training are frequently very important aspects of helping persons with low income move forward. Some related suggestions follow:[78]

- Encourage clients to consider how further education and training may help them move forward.
- Encourage clients to upgrade their education and training, if possible.
- Provide information regarding various options, including individual courses, part-time and full-time programs and funding that might be available.
- As funding options may have limits (e.g. grant-funded programs may only provide for a certain number of months), encourage clients to consider education goals for long-term solutions as opposed to using education for a quick fix (i.e. training to fill a temporary labour shortage).
- Encourage clients to consider enrolling in one course per term if that is most appropriate, given

their additional family and life commitments.

- Become familiar with not-for-profit organizations in your area that offer literacy and related programs and provide clients with appropriate referrals.
- Encourage clients to participate in computer training as appropriate. Such knowledge and skills improve marketability and enhance confidence. Computer literacy enhances employer's impressions of clients as up-to-date and productive.
- Help clients take advantage of available work placement or on-the-job training programs.

Focusing on Employment

"Previous work experience lasting at least one year is related to current employment, illustrating the value of long-term job experience."[79]

Helping clients with work search skills

As with all clients, persons with low income will benefit from information regarding work search skills.

Résumés

Some points regarding résumés include:[80]

- Help clients build résumés reflecting identified skills and strengths.
- Use résumé building as a self-esteem and confidence-building experience for clients.
- Help clients identify transferable skills based on previous experiences, including both life and work experience.

Some additional points follow: [81]

- Help clients access computers so that they can independently tailor résumés and cover letters.
- Provide appropriate referrals for clients with low literacy skills who may require assistance in crafting their work search materials.

Researching work

Encourage all clients to participate in:[82]

- information interviews
- job shadows
- volunteering.

These activities will be of particular value to clients with low literacy levels for whom written information is a challenge.

Creative approaches to work options

Help clients become creative in their approach to work by combining different jobs or types of work to achieve full-time work.[83] For example, if they enjoy seasonal work:

- investigate ways of continuing this year-round
- explore training for complementary seasonal employment. For example:
  - landscaper in summer and greenhouse labourer in winter
  - school bus driver in winter and farm labourer in summer.

Accessing the hidden job market

A very effective strategy related to work search is to access the hidden job market (positions that are open but not advertised) through personal networks. Clients with low income may not have access to a broad variety and quality of work through their own personal networks. Rankin's research suggests that, in some cases, their networks may be limited, so relying on those contacts will certainly limit the opportunities available to them. "The social networks of the urban poor are constrained by family poverty and by segregation into poor neighbourhoods, both of which reduce the number of employed network members."[84]

As Rankin also shows, "job-related social networks of women may be even more restricted for mothers of young children…Similar to poor and minority job seekers, gender-based network constraints of this sort disconnect many women from potentially resourceful job contacts that can lead to better jobs. It is one reason why some argue that formal methods of finding jobs, that allow women to get beyond the limits of their network resources, promote better employment outcomes for women."[85]

Given the possible limitations of clients' personal networks, counsellors can assist clients in finding ways to expand their networks and access other work opportunities.

Career ladders

"One promising strategy for rewarding work seeks to create career ladders to enable low-wage workers to advance through a progression of higher-skilled and better-paid jobs."[86] While this approach is typically structured and available through collaborative efforts of employers, training institutions, unions and so on, counsellors can help clients duplicate the concept in their approach to career building. On-the-job experience combined with formal or on-site training, are key aspects of this approach.

If clients are considering entry-level jobs, encourage them to:[87]

- ask questions about the possibility of advancement and on-the-job training provided by the organization
- consider the various characteristics of the organization.

Other things being equal, a larger organization (e.g. a fast-food chain) may provide more opportunities for advancement than a small, single-location organization (e.g. an independent restaurant).

Helping clients maintain employment

To help clients maintain employment, counsellors should help clients anticipate challenges and plan accordingly. Needs that frequently have an impact on employment include:[88]

- child care
- transportation
- appropriate clothing for work environments as well as warm clothing in cold climates
- nutrition, including food for lunch at work.

The importance of child care

"...[R]esearch has repeatedly demonstrated that child care is a key employment support for lone parents, and low income families more generally."[89]

Andrea Long

A Bad Time to be Poor in BC

Post-employment support

Having continually dealt with financial pressures and the challenges of managing on a low income for an extended period of time, clients may require support as they adjust to employment. Self-esteem, self-confidence and, in some cases, anxiety related to moving away from income support may be factors that lead to challenges in the workplace. Clients may benefit from assistance and support regarding problem solving, decision making and other workplace challenges.

In Conclusion

Persons with low income face tremendously complex challenges. Practitioners consistently reinforce the importance of a non-judgemental approach for counsellors, taking time to listen to clients and collaborating with colleagues in a multidisciplinary approach. Practitioners identify resilience as an important quality frequently demonstrated by clients. Helping clients identify and address existing issues while building on their strengths, including resilience, will provide a base for future-oriented career building.

Websites and Resource Organizations

Alberta Human Resources and Employment. *Alberta Works.* Retrieved July 5, 2005, from **www.gov.ab.ca/hre/albertaworks**

- provides information on the Alberta Works program, including employment and training services, income support, health benefits and child support services.

Alberta Food Bank Network Association. Retrieved July 8, 2005, from **www.afbna.ca**

- has information on food banks in Alberta as well as projects they are involved in

Canadian Association of Food Banks. Retrieved June 15, 2005, from **www.cafb-acba.ca**

- a national association of food banks and related organizations with a comprehensive on-line research library on food banks and their use in Canada

Canadian Council on Social Development. Retrieved June 15, 2005, from **www.ccsd.ca**

- a not-for-profit social policy and research organization focusing on issues such as poverty
- provides a variety of reports, research papers and statistics relating to poverty in Canada

Canadian Social Research Links. Retrieved June 27, 2005, from **www.canadiansocialresearch.net**

- a personal website by Gilles Séguin with more than 20,000 links to information, research and resources on poverty and welfare in Canada and around the world

Child and Family Canada. Retrieved July 6, 2005, from **www.cfc-efc.ca**

- offers public education information on family issues, including a section on family life and work

Edmonton Social Planning Council. Retrieved June 23, 2005, from **www.edmspc.com**

- an independent, not-for-profit, charitable organization that provides leadership to the community in addressing social issues and effecting changes to social policy
- provides fact sheets, articles, research regarding social issues

National Anti-poverty Organization. Retrieved June 18, 2005 from **www.napo-onap.ca**

- a Canadian organization that works for the betterment of the poor in Canada, with information and resources related to poverty issues

National Council of Welfare. Retrieved June 17, 2005 from **www.ncwcnbes.net**

- a citizens' advisory body to the Minister of Social Development Canada on matters of concern to low income Canadians
- publishes a welfare income report and Canadian poverty profile

Social and Enterprise Development Innovations. Retrieved June 28, 2005, from **www.sedi.org**

- a national charitable organization dedicated to enabling poor, unemployed and underemployed people to become self-sufficient

Service Alberta. Retrieved July 4, 2005, from **www.gov.ab.ca**

- provides a complete listing of all government services available to Albertans, including national listings with links to more information

The World Bank. Retrieved July 8, 2005, from **www.worldbank.org**

- an international organization fighting poverty in developing nations, providing loans and advice
- includes international news and developments related to poverty

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[3] *Ibid.*, p. 15.

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CHAPTER 11

Persons With Physical Disabilities

WHATWORKS:

Career–building Strategies for People From Diverse Groups

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Persons With Physical Disabilities

What do I wish I had known when I started working with persons with physical disabilities?

"I wish I'd known more about what people with disabilities say and how they feel about their disabilities, and I wish I had known more about watching for cues that would assist me to help them. For example, a person who seems angry and uncommunicative may have chronic pain or may have a mental health disability or a brain injury in addition to a physical disability. I think that I needed to understand more about how diverse and complex each person's situation is. People are along a continuum, from sensory or mobility disability since birth to learning to live with a newly acquired disability. Each person is unique in where they are on that continuum. Many don't feel that they have a disability: rather, their disability is part of who they are as a person or they're in transition learning and adjusting to who the new person is. My recommendation to counsellors is that they continue to listen and learn from their clients."

Patricia Sears

University of Alberta

Introduction

Persons with physical disabilities display the same range of interests, talents, aspirations and concerns as any other group of Canadians. Their physical disabilities refer to particular things these individuals cannot do because of some mobility, sensory or functional limitation. There are many types of disabilities, the most common relating to mobility, agility and pain, followed closely by hearing disabilities. [1]

Statistics

A government of Canada report (2004) indicated that over 12 per cent of Canadians, or 3.6 million people, report some type and level of disability. [2] In addition, 2.8 million Canadians report that they provide support to a family member or friend with a long-term health condition or disability.[3]

About one-third of working age adults with disabilities have not completed high school compared with one-quarter of those without disabilities. Similarly, one in 10 persons with disabilities has a university degree which is half that of the rest of the population.[4]

The employment rate for people with disabilities is 53 per cent compared with 76 per cent for those who do not have disabilities.[5] Sixty-seven per cent of adults with disabilities report having the personal and technological supports they need.[6] Lack of supports impacts the employment rate of persons with disabilities. In addition, disability affects the employment situation of family caregivers. In striving for autonomy and integration in the community, persons with physical disabilities seek the option of taking part in the labour force and of working at "regular" jobs.[7]

Over the past decade, persons with disabilities have experienced many changes due to an increase in technological aids and educational options. Employers and society are now more aware of missing a huge pool of talent, abilities and potential by not having people with disabilities in the workforce.[8]

It's beyond the scope of this manual to deal with every physical disability in detail. In fact, each disability has a body of literature related to personal, employment and career counselling within that disability. The *process* of career counselling persons with physical disabilities is no different than career counselling persons without disabilities. However, the issues for people with disabilities may be wider in scope than those of persons without disabilities.

The World Health Organization's (WHO) framework of disability is provided by the International Classification of Functioning (ICF). "This framework defines disability as the relationship between body structures and functions, daily activities and social participation, while recognizing the role of environmental factors."
Statistics Canada[9]

General Characteristics

Historical approaches to disability

Up until the 1970s, "disability was generally perceived as an individual pathology requiring treatment, rehabilitation and passive care. Medical diagnosis was used to determine if a person was 'disabled' and therefore, 'unemployable'."[10] Barriers were considered to be unavoidable. This approach is known as the *medical model of disability*.

During this period, a functional view of disability emerged. This approach considers that any problems persons with disabilities have arises from the disability or impairment. Solutions are sought "by strengthening the individual's capacity to work, through vocational, rehabilitation and therapeutic services."[11]

Since 1985 and the enactment of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the citizenship-rights approach has gained influence. This approach "recognizes the place and role of persons with disabilities in society, and the organizations that represent them, in shaping public policy…"[12]

Some people advance a *social oppression model* of disability. In this model, disability is seen more as a social construct than a medical reality. An individual may have an impairment, trauma or chronic illness but limitations are viewed as a result of "the way such matters are responded to and categorized by the wider society."[13]

Another approach is the Independent Living Movement. The term "Independent Living" was taken from 1959 California legislation that enabled people disabled by polio to leave hospital wards and move back into the community.

The Independent Living Movement has strongly influenced people's self-perception and their ways of organizing themselves.[14,15] The Independent Living or social advocacy approach is aligned with capacity building and a strength-based approach.[16]

More recent research (2001) suggests that common practice reflects a more eclectic approach in assisting people with disabilities. People are no longer seen as unemployable or unable to function normally. "Rather, workplaces are seen as either barrier-free and accessible or inaccessible."[17]

Over the past few decades "philosophical changes have occurred in how we view people with disabilities, in how we define and view community, and in how supports and services are provided…This has resulted in a system that is more responsive to the individual applicant from a person centered, or directed approach."[18]

A review of physical disabilities

To effectively counsel persons with physical disabilities it is, of course, vital to see the person first and the disability second. In order to help people build on their strengths, understanding the manifestations of disabilities may be helpful. The following section defines and briefly describes a range of physical disabilities, described as "impairments that hamper physical, vocational, or community activities."[19] Persons with disabilities are those who report difficulties performing daily living tasks and activities.[20]

Sensory-related disabilities
In Canada, "just over one million adults (4.4%) reported having a hearing-related disability, about 600,000 (2.5%) had vision difficulties, and some 360,000 or 1.5% of persons aged 15 and over, reported a speech-related disability."[21]

Persons with hearing loss: Deaf or hard of hearing
Many persons with hearing loss have some residual hearing. Some persons with hearing loss use sign language such as American Sign Language (ASL) or Langue des signes québécoise (LSQ) to communicate. Others use speech to communicate, using their residual hearing and hearing aids, technical devices or cochlear implants, and lip reading or speech reading.[22]

- Persons who are hard of hearing are people who:
  - have mild to severe partial hearing loss—a hearing aid may assist the person to hear, more so one-on-one than in a group of people
  - can hear only portions of words.
- Persons who are culturally deaf are people who:
  - identify with and participate in the language, culture and community of deaf people based on sign language
  - do not perceive hearing loss and deafness as a disability, but rather as the basis of a distinct cultural group[23]
  - do not wish to be labelled according to audiogram measurements and prefer not to be called "hard of hearing," "hearing impaired" or "hearing handicapped."[24]

Persons who are blind or partially sighted

Visual impairment is a generic term that covers a range of difficulties with vision and includes the following categories of persons with visual disabilities: blind, legally blind, partially sighted, low vision and cortically-visually impaired. [25] Many of those with visual impairments have some limited degree of vision.

- Persons with limited light perception:
  - may be legally blind as defined by having a field of vision less than 20 per cent or a visual acuity of 20/200 in one eye after correction[26]
  - may have limited areas of sight in the vision field, light and shadow perception, colour distinction or tunnel vision.
- Persons with impaired vision:
  - are not legally blind
  - may have lost an eye and have problems with depth perception
  - may have low vision or diminishing eyesight.
- Persons who are deaf-blind:[27]
  - have substantial loss of both sight and hearing so that neither one is an adequate or reliable source of information.

Mobility disabilities

Mobility disabilities are the type of disability most often reported by adults aged 15 and over. "In 2001, nearly 2.5 million or 10.5% of Canadians had difficulty walking, climbing stairs, carrying an object for a short distance, standing in line for 20 minutes or moving about from one room to another."[28]

Persons with mobility limitations:

- may use assistive devices to help overcome mobility obstacles
- may use different ways to get around
- may have mobility impairments that result from a number of different medical conditions: arthritis, multiple sclerosis, cerebral palsy, spina bifida, diabetes, muscular dystrophy and paraplegia.[29]
- may use a wheelchair or other aids such as crutches, canes and walkers
- may have lost arms, hands, feet or legs due to amputation or congenital problems.[30]

There are varying degrees of mobility impairment. Approximately 36,000 Canadians live with spinal cord injury. According to data gathered by the Canadian Paraplegic Association, nearly 55 per cent of mobility disabilities are the result of vehicle accidents; nearly 18 per cent are the result of falls and industrial accidents and medical conditions; diving and sporting accidents make up the remaining causes of injury.[31]

Agility-related disabilities

Activity limitations related to agility affect a substantial number of adults:

- "In all, 2.3 million or 9.7% of adults reported having difficulty with everyday activities that require skills such as bending down to pick up an object and getting dressed or undressed." [32]
- Activity limitations related to agility are very frequent, "with two-thirds of persons with disabilities reporting them."[33]

Disabilities from injuries

Injuries that result in disabilities most often occur on the job or as a result of vehicle accidents and sporting mishaps.

- Every three minutes, a worker is injured on an Alberta worksite. In 2003, there were almost 156,000 work-related injuries. Of these, more than 39,000 injuries were serious enough for the worker to miss work beyond the day of the accident.[34]
- People who have been injured or burned may have special environmental needs. For example, those who have been burned can be extremely sensitive to dust and pollutants in the workplace.

- Vehicle accidents and sporting accidents account for a variety of injuries ranging from neurological to mobility disabilities. Vehicle accidents account for the largest number of new spinal cord injuries, followed by falls (including industrial accidents), medical conditions, diving and other sporting activities.[35]

Chronic pain disabilities

Chronic pain disorders are widespread throughout the general population. Chronic pain disability is described as:

- ranging in intensity "from a dull, annoying ache, to intense, stabbing pain"[36]
- having been caused "by an initial mishap or more serious injury or condition, such as a back sprain or serious infection. The pain could also be caused by an ongoing condition such as arthritis and other degenerative joint diseases, digestive disorders, fibromyalgia or cancer."[37]
- being reported by adults almost as frequently as mobility-related disability. Some 2.4 million Canadians aged 15 and over (10.1 per cent) reported having activity limitations related to chronic pain.[38]

Autoimmune diseases

Autoimmune disorders and disabilities are also often characterized by chronic pain conditions. The term *autoimmune disease* encompasses about 80 serious and chronic diseases that involve almost every human organ system. The body's immune system becomes misdirected, attacking the very organs it was designed to protect.[39]

Autoimmune diseases are described as:[40]

- conditions or diseases such as lupus, multiple sclerosis, myalgic encephalomyelitis (chronic fatigue syndrome), fibromyalgia and many others. These may not always be obvious to the observer but they often affect individuals' energy level, strength and ability to concentrate.
- "diseases of the nervous, gastrointestinal, and endocrine systems, as well as skin and other connective tissues, eyes, blood and blood vessels."[41]
- conditions that may be slowly progressing or in remission and require special medical treatment.

Acquired brain injury

Brain injury symptoms may be hidden or obvious and are most often the result of vehicle collisions, stroke, aneurysms, violence, substance use, falls, workplace injuries and sports related events. There are various types of acquired brain injury including concussions, contusions, skull fractures, hematomas and anoxias (lack of oxygen to the brain).[42] Brain injury "is the leading cause of death and disability for Canadians under 34 years of age."[43]

Epilepsy

Epilepsy is a physical condition; it is not a form of mental illness. It is a neurological condition characterized by the tendency for recurrent seizures. "There are more than twice as many people with epilepsy in Canada as the number of people with cerebral palsy (55,000), muscular dystrophy (28,000), multiple sclerosis (39,000) and cystic fibrosis (3,400) combined. Epilepsy can occur as a single condition, or may accompany other conditions affecting the brain, such as cerebral palsy, mental retardation, autism, Alzheimer's and traumatic brain injury."[44]

Multiple disabilities

In addition to physical and sensory disabilities, people often identify other concerns (such as pain, psychological issues, memory, learning and developmental disabilities) at the same time. In the 2001 Statistics Canada Participation and Learning Survey, "18.2% of persons with disabilities reported having only one disability, whereas a sizable proportion of them reported three (29%) or even four or five (27.7%). Indeed, just under 8 per cent of persons with disabilities had six or more."[45]

Age and disability

The occurrence of disability among Canadians increases with age. This statement seems especially true for "disabilities related to mobility, agility, hearing, vision and pain. For example, while fewer than 2% of young adults aged 15 to 24 have a mobility-related disability, the rate reaches 31.5% for persons aged 65 and over."[46]

Severity of disability

Statistics Canada categorizes disabilities as being mild, moderate, severe or very severe. Levels are determined by:

- the "frequency and intensity of limitations associated with each type of disability"[47]
- the number of disabilities an individual reports.[48]

In 2001, nearly 34 per cent of adults reported a mild disability, while 27 per cent indicated they had a severe disability.[49]

Issues facing persons with physical disabilities

Persons with physical disabilities have lower labour force participation rates and higher unemployment rates than do persons without disabilities. As reported in 2004, the labour force participation rate of persons with disabilities was 49 per cent compared with 65 per cent for persons without disabilities. In addition, many people self report being underemployed.

Depending on their degree of adjustment to the onset of physically impairing disease or injury, persons with physical disabilities may be dealing with grief and loss, anger, denial, identity issues and many other reactions to loss and transition.[50]

Persons with physical disabilities may experience lack of self-esteem, lack of self-confidence and/or communication problems as a result of their disabilities. For cases of sudden injury or traumatic disability, clients may need to return to the exploratory stage of career development because they may not be able to continue in the same job or related positions held prior to injury or onset.

Practitioners report a variety of challenges and barriers confronting people with physical disabilities. Some of the environmental, social, systemic and personal challenges include the following:[51]

Environmental barriers

- inaccessibility to workplace, restrooms, fountains, parking
- lack of elevators, suitable floor surfaces and furniture
- limited financial support
- lack of support services (technical aids/assistants)
- anxiety-causing distractions
- lack of money for adapting workplaces

Systemic barriers

- irrelevant job requirements in job descriptions
- focusing on the disability rather than on the ability
- inflexibility in adapting physical demands of the job to the employee
- interpretation of "reasonable accommodation"
- challenges in co-ordinating available services
- low pay
- lack of personal care assistance in the workplace

Social challenges

- fear due to lack of understanding
- lack of awareness of capabilities of persons with physical disabilities
- stereotyped opinions such as being poor workers, in poor health, frequently absent
- unfair treatment because they are different
- exclusion from work-related and social activities

Personal issues

- lack of education and training
- lack of experience
- lack of self-awareness
- lack of self-confidence
- lack of self-esteem
- lack of social, interpersonal, self-management skills
- cost of transportation
- communication difficulties
- perceived lack of, or loss of, medical benefits upon gaining employment

Employer concerns and attitudes

Employer concerns and attitudes can sometimes present challenges for persons with physical disabilities. Examples of these are:[52]

- employer concerns about insurance, workplace safety, special privileges, job performance and attendance
- lack of valid information detailing the needs, capabilities and potential of persons with physical disabilities
- assumptions about what persons with physical disabilities can and cannot do as related to employer concerns about productivity
- concern about reactions of customers or co-workers

- restricted views of how a job should be done rather than considering alternative ways to do the work
- concern about accommodation costs.

> *"Today, persons with disabilities are represented in every sector or industry in our economy. Individuals with disabilities are simply real people looking for real jobs."*
> WORKink Alberta[53]

Perceived disincentives to work

Approximately half of the people with disabilities in Canada receive income from public income support systems. Such systems include income from a pension plan, a long-term disability pension or income support. Persons with disabilities who receive income from these sources may have the qualifications and the desire to work but may fear jeopardizing their benefits if they take a full-time job. Considering that persons with disabilities often include medical costs among their basic needs, many feel this is too big a risk to take. In addition, some fear losing benefits, not just because of the cost, but also because of the difficulty in having benefits reinstated if the job does not last.

However, financial assistance programs (Alberta Works Income Support) in Alberta have changed. Individuals receiving financial assistance are encouraged to maximize self-sufficiency (which for some means working). Individuals who are working while receiving financial assistance may receive a supplement to their earnings (i.e. a portion of their wages may be exempt when their benefits are calculated). Also in Alberta, people leaving financial assistance for jobs may continue to receive health benefits both for themselves and their children.

So, while loss of health benefits may still be a concern for clients, it may not be a reality. Counsellors are encouraged to become familiar with financial assistance programs and encourage clients to get more information about income exemptions and health coverage available to them before dismissing the idea of finding work.

Responding to Challenges: Strategies and Practices

Examining belief systems

The authors of *Achieving Career Balance* outline five basic beliefs about persons with physical disabilities that they feel should form the basis of career counselling for these individuals:[54]

- Each person with a disability deserves to be treated as a unique individual. Labels should be avoided whenever possible.
- "Persons with physical disabilities, no matter how disabled, have a limitless potential for becoming—not what we desire them to become [*sic*], but what is within them to become."[55]
- There are many ways to accomplish the same task, and individuals working with persons with physical disabilities must be open to the possibilities and exercise creativity.[56]
- Practitioners remark that everyone has some form of disability and career development can be a vehicle for growth for persons with disabilities. It is important to emphasize abilities, not disabilities, and to examine how society defines success.[57]
- People change or modify their job to focus on abilities and get around shortcomings. Accessibility modifications or accommodations are *seldom* a costly venture and these modifications can benefit other employees as well. In fact, data collected by the Job Accommodation Network (JAN) show that more than half of all accommodations cost hundreds, rather than thousands, of dollars. Furthermore, JAN statistics show most employers report financial benefits of providing accommodations: reduction in the cost of training new employees, a reduction in the cost of insurance and an increase in worker productivity.[58]

Communicating with clients

A variety of fact sheets and articles have been written to promote effective communication between practitioners and persons with various disabilities. A number of suggestions follow.

Working with clients who are deaf or hard of hearing[59,60]

- Look directly at lip-reading clients to allow for a clear view of your mouth.
- Keep hands away from your mouth.
- Speak a little more slowly and distinctly but try not to exaggerate your words.
- Be prepared to paraphrase or say the same thing using simpler or clearer words.
- Use a normal tone of voice and pitch. Increase your volume naturally only when the client asks you to.
- Face people with the light on your own face, if possible.
- Be patient if clients want to sit closer.
- Allow clients who have difficulty speaking or pronouncing words the extra time it takes to express themselves. Avoid interrupting or completing sentences for them.
- Write out explanations for clarification and backup. Use common language. Allow your clients with hearing loss time to read and respond. Encourage your clients to discuss these written explanations further with their significant others.
- Tell clients if they are speaking too loudly or too softly.
- Look directly at the client when using a sign language interpreter.
- Ask clients who have speech disabilities to repeat or rephrase conversation that is unclear to you.

Working with clients who are blind or partially sighted[61,62]

- Speak in your normal tone and volume and address people directly by name to ensure that you have their attention. Normal conversation is very important when you are concentrating on building rapport with clients.
- Let clients know when you are entering or leaving a room or performing a task. This ensures they know what is happening.
- Describe the contents of forms or other material you are using with clients. If possible, try duplicating the material in a preferred mode such as large type, Braille or on audio cassette.
- Ask clients if they need help to get around. When you act as a guide, allow people to hold your elbow and walk at a normal pace. Describe where you are going and point out objects, doors, etc. When you help clients sit down, place their hand on the back of the chair so that clients can seat themselves.
- Use your normal figures of speech when conversing with persons who are blind or visually impaired (e.g. “It’s good to see you.” or “We’ll have to see how that turns out.”).
- Respect the guide dog. The animal is on duty and is a vital tool for clients who are blind. Treat the dog as you would any third party there to assist clients.
- When discussing an object, show clients by placing it in their hands and letting them touch and examine it.

Working with clients with mobility disabilities[63]

- Sit down on a chair so that you are the same height as clients in wheelchairs.
- Arrange your office space *before* the need arises. Ensure that traffic areas are wide enough for wheelchair access.
- Meet in a conference room or larger space if your office doesn’t accommodate a wheelchair.
- Check with clients who use wheelchairs before helping them enter or exit a room.
- Respect that wheelchairs are part of the personal space of persons with mobility disabilities.
- “Person who uses a wheelchair” says all that is necessary when you are referring to such a client.

T.A.L.K.[64]

T — Take the time.
A — Ask, don’t assume.
L — Listen attentively.
K — Know your client’s needs.

Skills checklist for counsellors working with persons with physical disabilities[65]

Practitioners suggest that the following list may help counsellors identify some of the competencies required when working with persons who have physical disabilities. Place a checkmark next to those statements that are appropriate to complete the sentence, " I am able to…:"

___ interpret and advise about legislation, policy, guidelines and rights which affect persons with physical disabilities and their family members.

___ use diagnostic and informal assessment procedures with persons with physical disabilities.

___ apply relevant career development theory to assist in the analysis of self-concept, including strengths and any functional limitations of clients.

___ provide individual and group counselling.

___ work with other specialists in team approaches for educational or employment planning and placement.

___ work with employers in developing job restructuring for clients with physical disabilities.

___ plan and implement different types of skill-building workshops or experiences necessary for employability and work adjustment.

___ make referrals for appropriate assessment, such as those done by occupational therapists, physiotherapists, ergonomic specialists and neuropsychologists

___ create opportunities for job tryouts, either in agencies that have the assessment facility to conduct these or with an employer.[66]

Specific counselling skills related to building strengths

Practitioners encourage counsellors of persons with physical disabilities to consider the following factors:[67]

- Interact with clients as individuals and see their abilities rather than their disabilities.
- Encourage the autonomy of individuals while providing, or helping them access, the supports they require.
- Help clients identify and acquire personal and professional skills transferable to real work situations.
- Help clients determine how to apply their strengths to a variety of work situations.
- Involve as many partners as possible, including employers and other community agencies.

> ***How do you focus on strengths?***
>
> *"Assume that people are bright and have capabilities. Ask them, 'How have you gotten to where you're at? What do you think your strengths are?' Often people have lots of strengths and it's best to find out their competencies one-on-one."*
>
> Patricia Sears
> University of Alberta

Career development approaches

The authors of *Achieving Career Balance* suggest that the following models provide a foundation for current career work with people who have physical disabilities. Practitioners continue to build on these models developed over two decades ago:[68]

- Navin and Myers propose a six-part cyclical model loosely based on the work of Donald Super that allows for growth and change and has a variety of starting points. The cycle includes:
  - self-understanding
  - self-acceptance, including acceptance of the disability
  - career exploration
  - career selection
  - career evaluation.[69]
- Luca E. Conte notes that past models have failed to address the needs of individuals with disabilities. A modification of current theories, rather than a separate theory, is needed . Some considerations include:
  - how decision making and lifestyle options have been approached by persons with disabilities
  - how life experiences and self-concept influence their career choices
  - how environmental factors influence them

  - how counsellors who work with persons with disabilities can shift from a focus on job finding to career development.[70]

- McCarthy outlines a three-part approach to career development for persons with disabilities that involves a partnership among employers, counselling professionals and clients.[71]
- Curnow identifies a systematic approach, exposure to a variety of experiences early on, development of decision-making skills, supportive counselling and help accessing resources as important strategies.[72]
- Vandergroot recommends the adaptation of existing services to assist persons with disabilities and stresses the importance of clearly defined goals.[73]
- Nathanson and Lambert stress the need for persons with disabilities to know themselves well and have positive attitudes. It is also very important for clients to take control of the career-development process.[74]

A model for career counselling persons with physical disabilities

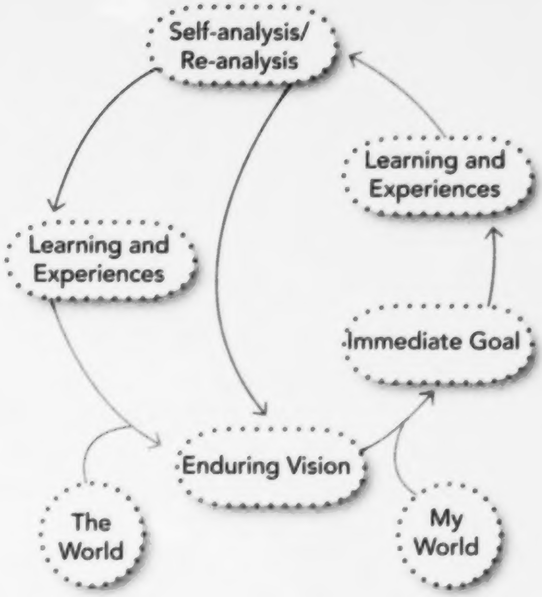
The model outlined in *Achieving Career Balance* addresses many recommendations from recent literature and focuses on building strength.[75] Counsellors using the *Achieving Career Balance* model help clients move toward greater independence and self-satisfaction because this model:

- is based on career-building principles and processes
- provides a bridge to a variety of labour market opportunities
- demonstrates potential career path opportunities through the labour market
- takes an individualized approach
- is competency-based.

Clients take control of their own career path and are supported by the career coach/counsellor while they are learning the skills to do this.

Components of the *Achieving Career Balance* model

The components of Achieving Career Balance include the career-building process, the personal profile and general areas of competence as indicated in the following figure.



Components of the *career-building process* model based on *Achieving Career Balance.*

The career-building process[76]

Decisions about one's career or life path are not discreet events. As the model shows, the career-building process occurs continually throughout life.

This process traces the planned and unplanned steps taken by individuals. An assessment of client's situations at a given time allows individuals to begin meaningful movement toward a future or enduring goal. As experience and learning accumulate over time, specific needs or goals will emerge from the context of client's immediate situations. Out of these contextual or immediate goals, clients will have new experiences and learning which in turn require the reassessment and possibly the re-adjustment of their future or enduring goals.

The personal profile[77]

To provide a useful assessment of the needs and situations of clients with physical disabilities, the model suggests helping clients complete a personal profile through structured, one-on-one interviews that result in a clear and comprehensive assessment of clients':

- needs and goals, both immediate and enduring
- interests and values
- skills and experiences
- background, training, education

- work and lifestyle preferences
- challenges that might impede growth and development.

> *"Use good, solid communication and counselling skills and recognize the person as a whole person. In terms of strengths the first thing is to find out what they like to do. Build confidence, work one-on-one, consider peer support groups, share testimonials and identify resources. Exchange materials that will be helpful to all parties involved and collaboratively seek solutions to problems. Give credit for their potential—the answers lie within them."*
>
> Gary Davis
>
> Alberta Human Resources and Employment

General areas of competence outlined

After the profile has been compiled, the focus turns to developing competence as required in the following five areas:

1. Systemic support

- education of employers
- formal mentorship
- job accommodations
- advocacy
- worksite and job analysis.

2. Personal support

- family
- informal mentor
- friends
- community resources
- professionals

3. Experience and learning

- volunteer work
- information interviews
- job shadowing
- paper research
- work experience

4. Job search

- basic job search skills
- negotiation
- networking
- hidden job market
- alternative work options

5. Lifestyle balance

- knowledge of self
- job maintenance
- exploring interests
- accommodation
- self-management skills
- lifestyle options
- involvement in community

The five competencies have been broken down further into capabilities, essential to maintaining a satisfying career path. The career counsellor will focus on:

- assisting clients in examining how the components are expressed in their life
- supporting clients in making informed decisions based on the assessment of needs *expressed by clients at that time.* Not all clients need or want to work on all competencies at any one time.

Each of the five competencies are examined more closely.

General areas of competence examined

Systemic support

The degree to which employers are willing to hire persons with physical disabilities, or society is willing to integrate people with differences, is a result of the information, assistance and incentive they are given in the form of:

- equity programs and/or legislation. In Alberta, it is important for counsellors and persons with disabilities to have knowledge of *The Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act*, particularly regarding an employer's duty to accommodate as well as the legal ruling of undue hardship.[78]
- education initiatives or partnerships
- persistent efforts by qualified individuals.

The cumulative effect of any programs and strategies provide persons with physical disabilities increased career opportunities and allow them to take part in the community on a more equal footing and to be seen by employers in a more favourable light.

Educating employers

As a career counsellor, you play a vital role in educating employers to diffuse the perceived or imaginary barriers preventing them from hiring persons with physical disabilities. Employers need to be made aware of:

- the advantages of hiring people with disabilities[79]
- up-to-date, factual information regarding the nature of disabilities [80]
- up-to-date factual information about technology and aids to assist persons with disabilities[81]
- information about barrier-free design[82]
- information about programs designed to assist the integration of workers with physical disabilities into the workforce.[83]

Worksite analysis

Worksite analysis involves an evaluation of the workplace environment. Assist clients to determine their needs. The total workplace environment could include:

- physical accessibility
- the work roles that clients are interested in and their analysis (see below)
- employer/employee education
- possibilities for movement within the organization.

The High Five of career development[84]

The following five principles are the basis for this model. Understanding them is vital to the model's effective implementation. During the counselling process, help clients:

1. *Focus on the journey*

   Create a personal vision that is flexible and adaptable to change. Help clients realize that every life experience adds to and is part of their career path.
2. *Follow your heart*

   Focus on those things that are important to the client. Values, interests and beliefs are the motivating forces that drive the counselling process.
3. *Be an ally*

   Identify those people in the client's immediate community (e.g. family, friends, neighbours) and surrounding community (e.g. professionals, organized groups) who are available to form part of a support system.
4. *Stay learning*

   Explore all opportunities, formal and informal, for skill development and personal growth.
5. *Change is constant*

   Be flexible and adaptable to changes taking place inside and out of the labour market.

Job analysis

Job analysis basically seeks answers to the question, "What will the employee do in the course of an average day?" Job analysis allows clients to:

- identify the requirements of the position
- determine how their strengths and abilities fit with the position
- determine the adaptations or accommodations that might be necessary.

Sample questions might be:[85]

- What happens if the task is performed incorrectly?
- How is success measured?
- What knowledge is necessary?
- What skills are necessary?
- What are the environmental conditions?
- How much problem solving, decision making and attention to detail is needed?
- How much emotional exertion, such as stress and pressure, is needed?

After job analysis, you'll work with clients and the employer, in some cases, to help clients creatively meet the challenges inherent in the work role. You can provide the employer with information about reasonable job accommodations: adjustments to a task or workplace to accommodate a job-related functional limitation.[86] Types of accommodations include:

- making workplace facilities more accessible (e.g. washrooms, illumination, ramps)
- modifying work schedules (e.g. splitting positions, allowing rest periods and time off for medical appointments)
- acquiring or modifying equipment or devices (e.g. Braille writer, sound and print amplification, reaching aids)
- installing access ramps where necessary
- providing qualified support services assistants (e.g. interpreters, readers and travel assistants)
- considering work alternatives (e.g. telecommuting).

> *"It is particularly important for people with physical disabilities to learn how to do their own job analysis and problem solving. Then the issue is not about the disability but about their knowledge and skill. If clients can show employers that they've thought these issues through, then that indicates that they will be more able to manage their work and life."*
>
> Audrey Stechynsky
> Human Resources and Skills
> Development Canada

In Alberta, the Disability Related Employment Supports program (DRES) is available to offer workplace supports such as:[87]

- job orientation
- worksite orientation
- job coaching
- co-worker preparation
- technological aids
- worksite modifications.

Practitioners recommend staying current about funding sources in your area available to businesses to help defray the costs of modifying the workplace.

Advocacy

Many people with physical disabilities would benefit from developing or enhancing their self-advocacy skills. These skills can be invaluable when discussing job or learning accommodations with employers or instructors. There may be situations where clients could benefit by having an advocate who speaks on their behalf, especially if they are unable to speak or negotiate themselves. You can help clients determine:

- how and when to use an advocate
- the needs that an advocate can meet on another's behalf
- how to find an advocate.

Personal support

A strong system of personal support may provide clients with physical disabilities with:

- increased self-esteem and self-confidence
- emotional balance
- wider participation in the community
- a sense of empowerment.

Understanding how to develop and maintain a support system is vital to the maintenance of a satisfactory career path. Such a system includes family, professionals, informal mentors, allies, peers and community resources.

One unique way of helping clients build their support system is through the use of mentoring or peer-support programs. Role models are used initially to ease and assist transition into the workforce for persons with disabilities as well as to assist in professional development and personal satisfaction once the client is working.[88]

Your client needs to be aware of how to build a support system on the job as well. Co-workers need information regarding persons with disabilities and should be given the opportunity to share perceptions and fears. A new employee with a physical disability, like any new employee, needs a thorough orientation that includes information about social and unwritten rules. Open and effective communication is the key to helping people feeling accepted and valued on the job.

> *"There are so many options now. . . Specialized agencies can help clients create work experience and training-on-the-job placements. The Disability Related Employment Supports program can help offset the cost of training as well as help people cover most of the costs of an interpreter or a portable TTY and portable TTY printer. When clients are motivated and you can help put the right things in place, then you feel that this is going to work out well."*
>
> Norah Hodgson
> Alberta Human Resources
> and Employment

Experience and learning

As a career counsellor, part of your role is to assist clients with physical disabilities to integrate what they are learning or have learned about themselves and relate their experiences and learning to their career path options.

Experience and learning includes formal academic coursework, school and research, as well as less formal opportunities to develop skills and to explore ideas. Relevant activities include:[89]

- volunteering
- job shadowing
- information interviews with people working in a field
- work experience (e.g. on-the-job training, internships and co-op educational experiences)
- paper and Internet research.

Work experience opportunities can be particularly fruitful for clients with physical disabilities. You can help clients obtain this experience by:

- helping them identify suitable and interested employers
- profiling the targeted positions and comparing these to clients' personal profiles to identify gaps
- using the gaps to help employers and clients devise an individualized training program
- negotiating a timeframe and strategy to gain work experience.

> *"You have an opportunity to be a change agent, not only out there in the world challenging stereotypes, but also in helping your clients see themselves as whole, as contributors. Use all the tools we have available to us to help clients see their strengths to be able to work, whether it is four hours a day or working from home."*
>
> Dr. Patricia Pardo
> University of Calgary

Focusing on Employment

The last two general competencies in the *Achieving Career Balance* model focus specifically on employment.

Job search

Although résumés, letter-writing and interview skills are vital, the job search is more than a plan of action. The job search is about using imagination and ingenuity to create possibilities in the job market. The process must also furnish opportunities that allow the employer to see the client with a physical disability as a unique individual with a range of *abilities*. The competencies that need to be addressed include:

- job searching skills
- networking skills
- negotiating skills
- identifying and accessing the hidden job market.

Learning to negotiate is essential for job seekers with physical disabilities so that they can feel comfortable asking for what they need to succeed in the job, including:

- a training period
- work experience or a probationary period
- optional tasks
- job accommodations or assistive technology.

> *"The transition from a post-secondary institution into the workplace can be difficult for anyone. It takes confidence in your abilities, initiative and persistence. Students with disabilities can ease that transition by pursuing relevant volunteer experience, job shadow opportunities and internships while they are still attending school. It may be that they need to redistribute their academic course load throughout the year in order to access these opportunities. However, if they are able to build practical connections with the world of work while they are in post-secondary, it is much more likely that they will find and retain meaningful employment after graduation."*
>
> Joanne Yardley
> University of Alberta

Any current or recent post-secondary students you may be working with are likely very familiar with technology, but they may require assistance creating and analyzing work options for themselves.[90]

Since the hidden job market is the source of so many work opportunities, knowing how to tap into it is vital. Achieving this depends on being able to help clients use:[91]

- cold calls
- websites, listservs and electronic job postings
- newsletters
- networks of people
- local, regional and national newspaper articles
- radio and television news events or announcements
- yellow pages and business directories
- employment agencies.

> *"Assistive or adaptive technology is changing the opportunities for people to be employed. For example, screen readers for blind and partially sighted people, voice-recognition technology and so on. In addition, there are more opportunities now to refer clients with disabilities for assessments for adaptive technology."*
>
> Patricia Sears
> University of Alberta

Reframing job search negatives

Clients with physical disabilities may require help to reframe the negatives of job search, with its rejections, stress and self-doubt, into positive experiences and ideas.

Negative	Positive
Employers don't want to hire someone with a disability.	Employers want to hire *qualified* applicants. *I'm* qualified.
Employers won't be willing to make the job accommodation I need.	Many employers will voluntarily make accommodations for qualified applicants.
Any employer who hires me will only do so because of tokenism, public relations or equity legislation.	Once I'm on the job, I have the skills to prove that hiring me was the right decision.

Discussing disclosure

Disclosure is another important job search issue for persons with physical disabilities—if, when and how to tell a prospective employer about a disability. Articles written about disclosure usually discuss these possible disclosure opportunities: third-party referral, résumé, cover letter, employer call for an interview, your call to disclose, application and interview (at the moment of meeting, at the pre-offer or post-offer and pre-acceptance stage).[92]

The key question facing clients is: "Does disclosure of my disability at this time and in this way support my objective of getting hired?" *Only clients* can judge how, when and if to disclose personal information. Creating pro/con lists or identifying the advantages and disadvantages of disclosing personal information may help clients clarify what to do.[93]

Expanding options

Witt describes another important consideration for clients with physical disabilities: that of job "clans" or families. This concept opens options for clients to transfer skills, interests and values from a previous career or goal to one that matches their abilities. For example, an athlete with a spinal cord injury will not likely be able to engage in most professional sports activities but could be a coach, a manager, an agent, a scout, a broadcaster or journalist.[94]

Looking at work alternatives

An increasingly important category of employment for all clients, but of special interest to persons with physical disabilities, is non-traditional forms of employment such as contracting, part-time work, telecommuting and job sharing. These forms of employment are becoming more prevalent and may offer a variety of benefits to persons with physical disabilities. Practitioners can help their clients examine these alternatives, any of which may work well for different people.[95,96]

Lifestyle balance

The final competency in the model is lifestyle balance. This appears to be a major factor in predicting career satisfaction for persons with physical disabilities who are successfully employed. This competency includes knowledge of self, involvement in community, exploring interests, lifestyle options, self-management skills (e.g. communication, time management, self-esteem, goal setting), accommodation and job maintenance.

People acquire job maintenance skills by:

- using self-management skills to become a valued employee
- continuing to learn, formally and informally
- being a good worker and taking an interest in the organization
- communicating effectively, listening well
- using conflict-management skills and speaking assertively
- dressing and grooming appropriately for the job.

> *"People with disabilities know other people with disabilities. Is there anybody in their community or social network who is working and doing really well? Help people find role models. Help them learn different ways to manage their lives by thinking about things like 'What's my back-up plan when something unforeseen happens'?"*
>
> Audrey Stechynsky
> Human Resources and Skills
> Development Canada

In working through the competencies in this model with clients, they are learning and taking responsibility for all facets of their career development, including job satisfaction. This can be an empowering process and as such, one that is vital to the success of people with physical disabilities in the workplace.

In Conclusion

Counsellors working with persons with physical disabilities continue to enhance their knowledge and skills by:[97]

- "seeking training that is available
- attending events like the Building Tomorrow Today[98] conferences. There are always several sessions on diversity issues there.
- contacting the various community organizations that serve people with disabilities in your community. Go there to meet informally and ask them about the issues being faced by people they serve.
- reflecting on your own values, beliefs and assumptions with respect to disability as an aspect of social identity. There are few formal venues for career development practitioners to do this. At the heart of an acceptable professional practice is a process that allows you to reflect on your own values, beliefs and assumptions when you're working with a new person."
- learning from your clients and continually following up, including case conferences with any of the agencies involved with clients. "Too often people are referred to one agency that sends them to a certain workshop.

> Then they are referred back to the original agency that then sends them to a different service—ongoing learning and staying current will help practitioners make timely and useful referrals."[99]

Career development practices are dynamic, influenced by the ever-changing labour market trends and requirements. Advances in technology, support services and changing public perceptions of the capabilities of disabled workers combined with a wider range of program alternatives greatly affects the career potential of disabled persons. Career counsellors have a responsibility to keep current with such developments.

Websites and Resource Organizations

A New Perspective. Retrieved on June 17, 2005, from **www.members.shaw.ca/jen_jesso/basics/whatisblind.htm**

- one individual's website to promote understanding of blindness, orientation and mobility, technical adaptation, etc.
- includes resources about blindness, eye conditions and adaptive technology (e.g. computer accessibility: hardware and software aids, including screen magnification, low vision and optical devices, video and audio files, use of colour, format and layout, etc.)

Canadian Human Rights Commission. *A place for all: A guide to creating an inclusive workforce.* Minister of Public Works and Government Services. Retrieved on May 11, 2005, from **www.chrc-ccdp.ca/pdf/chrc_place_for_all.pdf**

- includes procedures and policies for employers to help them fulfil their legal obligation to accommodate all individuals
- this document is also available as a sound recording, in large print, in Braille and on computer diskette from **www.chrc-ccdp.ca**

Alberta Human Rights Commission. Retrieved on May 16, 2005, from **www.albertahumanrights.ab.ca**

- has information about the education and information services available, legislation related to human rights, electronic newsletters education funding and financial assistance and links to other organizations seeking to reduce discrimination and foster equality

Alberta Human Resources and Employment. *Alberta profile: Persons with disabilities in the workforce.* Data Development and Evaluation Branch. Retrieved on May 11, 2005, from **www.gov.ab.ca/hre/lmi/pdf/pdd_profile1.pdf**

- provides Alberta facts, charts and summaries of data on persons with disabilities (e.g. statistics, types of disabilities, employment, income, etc.)

American Chronic Pain Association. Retrieved on June 1, 2005, from **www.theacpa.org**

- provides peer support and education for those living in pain and their families
- raises awareness about issues of living with chronic pain

AROGA. Retrieved on May 31, 2005, from **www.aroga.com**

- an assistive technology website
- helps individuals pursue employment, education and an independent lifestyle through enabling technologies

Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada. *Assets and abilities: Your guide to work, income security and multiple sclerosis.* Retrieved on May 24, 2005, from **www.mssociety.ca/en/pdf/MS%20Assests%20Abilities.pdf**

- a user guide on adjustments to the workplace and sources of disability income support

Canadian Cultural Society of the Deaf. Retrieved on June 11, 2005, from **www.ccsdeaf.com**

- an association to preserve, encourage and advance the cultural heritage of Canada's deaf population

Canadian Paraplegic Association. Retrieved on May 11, 2005, from **www.canparaplegic.org**

- assists "persons with spinal cord injuries and other physical and mobility disabilities to achieve independence, self reliance and full community participation"
- provides counselling services; education and support for rehabilitation and employment; resources, including web links and research
- advocates for community involvement, policy development and accessibility

Capital Health Care. Assistive device service. Retrieved on June 10, 2005, from **www.capitalhealth.ca/YourHealth/Campaigns/ADS/default.htm**

- provides assistive technology through the I Can Centre at the Glenrose Hospital in Edmonton
- provides assessment and intervention services for people who need assistive technology

Chronic Pain Association of Canada. *Living with pain.* Retrieved on June 1, 2005, from **www.chronicpaincanada.org**

- has pain resources, links, articles and personal stories

Disability Information for Students and Professionals. Retrieved on May 15, 2005, from **www.abilityinfo.com**

- resources and links to hundreds of websites on a range of disability-related topics (includes job postings and discussion forums)

EmployAbilities. Retrieved on May 11, 2005, from **www.employabilities.ab.ca**

- a not-for-profit organization in Edmonton providing information to those with disabilities as well as practitioners
- provides programs and services related to career planning, job search, training, personal management and other related topics

EnableLink. Retrieved on April 26, 2005, from **www.abilities.ca**

- has links for people with disabilities on everything from living independently to seeking work to guides on preventing violence
- offers *Abilities* magazine
- an archive provides a wide range of articles at **www.enablelink.org/abilities/archive.html**

Entrepreneurs with Disabilities Network. The Community Futures Development Corporation of Western Canada. Western Economic Diversification Canada. Retrieved on June 7, 2005, from **www.communityfutures.ca/disabilities**

- a program to help entrepreneurs with disabilities achieve their business goals in rural settings
- links to further information for entrepreneurs

Gallaudet University and Gallaudet Research Institute. Retrieved on April 26, 2005 from **gallaudet.edu**

- provides undergraduate and graduate level liberal arts education for students who are deaf or hard of hearing and those who can hear
- includes programs related to career development programs and the history, language and culture of persons who are deaf or hard of hearing

Paths to Equal Opportunity. Retrieved on April 26, 2005, from **www.equalopportunity.on.ca**

- an Ontario government website
- provides information on a range of topics: inclusive design, communicating (e.g. creating your own talking books), accessibility (e.g. touring), workplace accommodation (e.g. how employers can accommodate workers with disabilities), grants and funding

Canadian Council on Social Development. Retrieved on June 8, 2005, from **www.ccsd.ca/perception/214/per_214a.htm**

- e-workbook covering job search process and information for persons with disabilities

Human Resources and Skills Development Canada. Inventory of federal programs and initiatives related to disability. Retrieved on May 24, 2005, from **www.hrsdc.gc.ca/asp/gateway.asp?hr=en/hip/odi/documents/inventory/index.shl&hs=pyp**

- a complementary tool to advance inclusion of persons with disabilities

Independent Living Institute. Retrieved on June 9, 2005, from **www.independentliving.org**

- a not-for-profit foundation offering resources to persons with disabilities (e.g. studying and working abroad, vacation home exchange for those with disabilities)
- promotes self determination and quality of life of persons with disabilities (e.g. personal assistance, mainstream taxi and assistive technology)

Job Accommodation Network (JAN). Retrieved on May 24, 2005, from **www.jan.wvu.edu**

- SOAR, the searchable on-line accommodation resource, provides ideas for researching accommodation options for work or school
- JAN By Disabilities is an A to Z link offering fact sheets on dozens of disabilities, accommodation ideas and sample scenarios about implementing these options
- a U.S. government research project to determine employment challenges for persons with disabilities

Northern Alberta Brain Injury Society. Retrieved on June 10, 2005, from **www.nabis.ab.ca**

- promotes an optimal lifestyle for individuals and their families in northern Alberta affected by brain injury
- provides information, service co-ordination, support and advocacy for people with brain injury

Persons with disabilities online. Service Canada. Retrieved on May 24, 2005, from **www.pwd-online.ca**

- provides a full range of disability-related programs and services across Canada

Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities. Alberta Seniors and Community Supports. Retrieved on May 11, 2005, from **www.seniors.gov.ab.ca/CSS/premiers_council**

- the website of an advocacy body with goals of advising the provincial government and promoting improvements for persons with disabilities

Public Health Agency of Canada. Retrieved on May 17, 2005, from **www.canadian-health-network.ca**

- houses news on dozens of health promotion topics such as healthy eating and fitness, housing, income, education, relationships, workplace health and environmental health
- offers newsletters, links and articles

Simple Abilities. Retrieved on June 7, 2005, from **www.simpleabilities.com**

- provides a range of disability equipment and products related to daily living, work and education

Statistics Canada. (2001). *Profile of disability among adults.* Retrieved on June 8, 2005, from **www.statcan.ca/english/freepub/89-577-XIE/adults.htm**

- has statistics and descriptions of persons with disabilities from the Participation and Limitation Survey

The Canadian Association of Independent Living Centres. Retrieved on June 10, 2005, from **www.cailc.ca**

- the Independent Living movement promotes the full economic, social, political and cultural inclusion of people with disabilities into Canadian life
- provides empowerment to and removes barriers for people with disabilities to allow them to make choices that affect their quality of life

The Office for Disability Issues. Government of Canada. Retrieved on May 16, 2005, from **www.sdc.gc.ca/en/gateways/nav/top_nav/program/odi.shtml**

- with key partners, the office promotes full participation of persons with disabilities
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CHAPTER 12

Youth

WHATWORKS?

Career–building Strategies for People From Diverse Groups

Youth

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Youth

What do I wish I would have known when I first started working with youth?

"I wish I would have known to take the time up front to not rush too much into solutions, to explore with young people what they want, what their skills and abilities are. I wish I would have taken more time to get to know them, even when timeframes were tight."

Audrey Stechynsky
Human Resources and Skills Development Canada

Introduction

Statistics

"Statistics Canada defines youth as those people between the ages of 15 and 24 years."[1]

"In 2003, there were more than 4 million Canadians between 15 and 24 years of age, comprising 14% of Canada's total population."[2]

"Like the overall population, most youth live in an urban area. In 2003, 81% of all Canadian youth aged 15 to 24 resided in census metropolitan areas…the remaining 19% of Canadian youth lived in small towns and rural areas."[3]

Statistics Canada[4] provides the following additional information regarding Canadian youth for 2003:

- The unemployment rate for youth was the highest of all age groups at 13.8 per cent, compared with a rate of 6.5 per cent for those 25 to 54 years old.
- Nearly one-third of all unemployed people were 15 to 24 years old.
- Just over half the young people looking for work in 2003 were teenagers (aged 15 to 19). The unemployment rate for teenaged youth was 18.1 per cent compared with 10.9 per cent for 20- to 24-year-olds.
- 56 per cent of young people were attending school full time, a much higher rate than the rate of 41 per cent in 1976.
- 39 per cent of youth have jobs while they are full-time students.
- Of those full-time students who were working, 57 per cent were employed in entry-level service positions, such as retail salespeople, cashiers, food counter and kitchen helpers and service station attendants, among others.
- More than two in five youth worked part time in 2003. Youth are more likely to work part time in the retail trade, food services and information and culture and recreation.

Alberta statistics

In 2004:

- Young people, 15 to 24 years of age, represented 14.8 per cent of the population of Alberta.[5]

In December 2005:

- The seasonally adjusted unemployment rate for Alberta was 4.1 per cent compared with the national rate of 6.5 per cent. Alberta's seasonally adjusted rate was the lowest in Canada.[6]
- 17.2 per cent of the total number of employed people (1,798,600) was youth.[7]
- The unemployment rate for youth 15 to 24 years was 7.2 per cent compared with an adult (25+) rate of 3.2 per cent.[8]
- With an unemployment rate of 5.2 per cent, female youth experienced a lower rate than male youth at 9.1 per cent.[9]

"Economically, the world is getting smaller. Information technology has broken down barriers and created global markets for local goods and services. Electronic (e-) commerce and wireless communications continue to grow. New trade partnerships are being formed to create new opportunities for doing business."[10] Globalization, technological change and organizational restructuring have resulted in a new world of work for experienced workers. Youth, on the other hand, have always lived in this new world. They have an "information-age

Their [youth's] labour market will be so different from what we see. The choices that they are making will fit for them and the labour market they will be in. Many youth are very entrepreneurial by nature and some get squashed because they are expected to conform to 'our' ideas. Don't judge their choices based on previous labour markets. And don't judge their ideas on what we are comfortable with."

Kristen Cumming

Red Deer College

mindset…[youth] have never known life without computers and the Internet. To them the computer is not a technology—it is an assumed part of life."[11]

There is a wealth of information available to assist counsellors working with youth. A challenge for counsellors is to become familiar with these resources and to manage the ongoing influx of new information. A related challenge is to help youth become aware, not only of these many resources, but also of how to access them.

General Characteristics

"The Net Generation has arrived. The baby boom has an echo, and it's even louder than the original…It [Net generation] is the first to grow up surrounded by digital media. Computers can be found in the home, school, factory and office and digital technologies, such as cameras, video games, and CD-ROMs are commonplace. Increasingly these new media are connected by the Internet… Today's kids are so bathed in bits that they think it's all part of the natural landscape. To them, digital technology is no more intimidating than a VCR or a toaster."[12]

Don Tapscott

Growing up digital: The rise of the net generation

Technology: The net generation

Dorman,[13] in his discussion of Tapscott's work, identifies the following characteristics for the consideration of those working with and planning activities for the Net generation:

- *Fierce independence.* They tend to be information seekers rather than passive information recipients, displaying autonomy and independence.
- *Emotional and intellectual openness.* They are used to being very open about personal information, likes, dislikes and inner thoughts, as they have done this on-line for some time.
- *Inclusion.* With the ability to connect with others around the world, they are not bound by racial or ethnic stereotypes or geographical boundaries.
- *Free expression and strong views.* Through the Internet, they are exposed to a wide variety of beliefs and opinions, frequently anonymously, and are able to express their own beliefs strongly and anonymously, if they choose.
- *Innovation.* They are very comfortable with new technology and adopt it readily and easily.
- *Preoccupation with maturity.* They demand to be taken seriously and expect to be measured by their ideas, not their age.
- *Investigation.* Many seem to be interested not only in using available technology, but also in knowing how it works.
- *Immediacy.* This group lives in a real-time world where responses on-line are immediate, and they expect the same immediate gratification in the rest of their lives.
- *Sensitivity to corporate involvement.* These youth are accustomed to free, individual expression and have turned away from media monopolies while developing a sensitivity and suspicion to corporate interests.
- *Authentication and trust.* Many youth appreciate the potential for fraud, inaccuracy and deception on the Internet, reinforcing the importance for them to be aware of authenticity and trust of information.

"…Canadian children have greater access, at home and school, to computers than those of almost every other developed country…At home, even though poor children have less access to computers than their middle-class peers, at least nine of every 10 households own one."[14]

> *"Alberta has the highest number of households accessing the Internet in Canada."*
> Alberta Careers Update 2004[15]

Generation fearless

Leah McLaren calls today's youth "Generation Fearless—bold enough to want your job and brazen enough to go after it. Today's twentysomethings have turned out to be the cockiest in recent history."[16] She continues to discuss the sense of entitlement that many youth demonstrate, having been brought up treated as equals in relationships with their parents.

Scott Beale, the American author of the book *Millennial Manifesto*, cited by McLaren, also agrees that youth demonstrate a high degree of self-confidence and that they "feel that…[they] can change the world, and many young people, in fact, are changing the world. The very youth-negative culture that existed in the seventies has been replaced with one that is at times very supportive of young people."[17]

Millennials

Beale, as cited in Oblinger,[18] refers to youth as the millennials—those born in or after the year 1982—and states they exhibit the following characteristics that make them different from their older siblings. Millennials:

- "gravitate toward group activity;
- identify with their parents' values and feel close to their parents;
- spend more time doing homework and housework and less time watching TV;
- believe 'it's cool to be smart';
- are fascinated by new technologies;
- are racially and ethnically diverse; and
- often (one in five) have at least one immigrant parent."

The parent connection

Cool parents

According to Tapscott, the generation gap has disappeared. Many youth think their parents are cool and are quite connected with them. They see their parents as up to date regarding youth's favourite music and they seek their parents' opinions on everything from questions about sex to snack foods.[19] Bernes and Magnusson also point out that "Students turn to their parents as the primary source of career planning help."[20]

Over-functioning parents

Clearly, parents are an extremely influential force in the lives of youth. So much so, in some cases, that Karyn Gordon, a psychotherapist and parent/teen coach, refers to the over-functioning parent,[21] to describe parents who, in her words, overindulge their children. Such parents may drive their children everywhere, may be overinvolved in the youth's activities and may be overly protective and so on. As a result, youth may not develop healthy self-esteem and are at risk of not learning to self-initiate.[22]

> *"I never realized how critical parents are. They are our co-clients. They co-purchase (along with the student) education, housing and other services. Ultimately, it is so important to include parents."*
> Kristen Cumming
> Red Deer College

Youth: Staying at home longer and then…moving back in

"Young adults are living at home longer and returning home after leaving at increasing rates."[23] "The percentage of young adults living with parents has been increasing; …[as far back as] 1996, 23% of women and 33% of men were estimated to be living at home."[24] *Alberta Careers Update 2004* also states that "Rising costs in education and the increased cost of living keep many young people living with their parents while they go to school."[25]

Education

Statistics

Bowlby and McMullen, in a survey completed for Human Resource Development Canada,[26] examined the educational and labour market participation at December 1999 of Canadian youth aged 18 to 20. With regard to high school participation, they found that by the age of 20[*]:

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[*] The age of 20 is used as the reference point for high school dropouts because it takes into account the second chance available in Canada where youth who drop out return to school at a later date.

- 85 per cent had graduated
- 12 per cent had dropped out
- 3 per cent were continuing with their high school studies
- 15 per cent of young men were dropouts
- young women dropped out with a rate of 9 per cent
- the dropout rate (12 per cent for 20-year-old youths in 1999) declined considerably since 1991 when the rate for the same age youth was 18 per cent
- the high school dropout rate has declined in every province since 1991.

They also found that:

- almost one-half of high school dropouts aspired to completing some form of post-secondary education
- roughly 66 per cent of the high school graduates aspired to completing some type of university degree
- 60 per cent of 18 to 20 year olds not in high school had experience with post-secondary programs
- just over one-half of 18 to 20 year old graduates studied were enrolled in post-secondary education, including 57 per cent of females and 47 per cent of males
- more males than females enter the labour market directly from high school either as graduates or as high school leavers.

Barriers to post-secondary education

About half of the youth who participated in the HRDC study by Bowlby and McMullen[27] reported facing barriers to post-secondary education. The barriers identified include:

- financial barriers
- inability to gain acceptance in program of choice
- not enough interest or motivation
- wanting to work
- caring for their own children.

Additional characteristics relating to educational attainment

Some additional characteristics emerged relating to educational attainment of 18 to 20 year olds who participated in the Bowlby and McMullen study. Youth having attained differing levels of education rated their skills as follows: [28]

- post-secondary education participants: very good to excellent
- high school dropouts with no post-secondary education: poor or fair
- full labour market participants directly from high school: weak

Education and employment prospects

There is a clear connection between level of education and employment prospects. "The higher the education level, the lower the unemployment rates… [for youth]."[29] For example, in 2004, Canadian youth reporting having "some high school" education experienced an unemployment rate of 12.7 percent, while those reporting having "some post-secondary" or a "post-secondary certificate or diploma" experienced an unemployment rate of between 5 and 6 per cent.[30] More than 60 per cent of new jobs require a minimum of post-secondary education.[31]

A 2005 international study examined the impact of low levels of education on young people and the difficulties they may experience connecting to the labour market. These findings reinforce the relationship between education and employment prospects. Some of the conclusions reached by the study were:[32]

- Due to a number of economic, social and cultural mechanisms, low levels of education are often transmitted from one generation to the next.
- Young adults with low levels of education face a greater risk of unemployment and the likelihood of being unemployed for longer or multiple periods of time. This group may not benefit from positive turns in the economy.
- Experience in the labour market does not compensate for low levels of education. A longer presence in the labour market does not make up for an initial deficit of educational credentials.
- Vocational training leading to credentials recognized by employers appear effective in leading to immediate opportunities to hold skilled jobs.

Career maturity

While youth may appear to be preoccupied with their social schedules, sports or hobbies and a variety of other activities, they are also "actively thinking about their future."[33]

Pyne et al., in a study completed in southern Alberta, found that for the junior and senior high school students sampled:

- "[o]ccupation tended to be defined primarily as a short-term job that was necessary in order to make a living
- [c]areer tended to be defined as a lifelong job that people chose or aspired to perform in a specific field
- …[a]s students got older, the term career was increasingly associated with themes such as 'life roles,' history of occupations,' and 'contribution to society'."[34]

School-to-work transition

A young person's career development process tends to be dominated by the school-to-work transition. Like all major life transitions, this one takes and needs time. Each person responds individually, with the ability to manage the transition depending on many factors, including:

- self-confidence
- resourcefulness
- resilience
- support systems.

Potential issues for youth in transition

With limited life experience, youth have not had the same opportunity as adults to develop in many areas that relate to career building and employment. They may have limited self-awareness. They may also have limited information regarding the career-building process and how they might move forward most effectively.

Employability factors

Employability factors, including personal (attitudinal), technical and transferable skills, are important to all workers including youth. Youth may face a number of employability barriers relating to these factors.

Job adjustment barriers[35]

Employability also involves being able to do the job to the satisfaction of the employer. Young people may face adjustments in the following areas:

- reaching and maintaining satisfactory job performance
- fitting into the organization
- adapting to co-workers
- proving to be a responsible worker
- maintaining a good attitude.

"The last adjustment task, developing a positive work attitude, is probably the single largest stumbling block for high-risk youth."[36]

Additional barriers[37]

Disadvantaged youth face additional employability and employment barriers, including:

- the need for child care and transportation
- social and interpersonal conflicts
- financial problems
- legal problems
- emotional/personal problems, which may lead to health problems
- substance abuse
- discrimination.

"Youth in care also face unique challenges on the road to adulthood. Transitioning to independence is expected at an earlier age and supports are often cut off when a young person turns 18….youth who grow up in foster care have typically experienced minimal control over their lives and by the time they reach 18 have had little practice making decisions for themselves….They need more rather than fewer resources, yet are most likely to lack access to family

Establishing rapport and trust

"Ensure that youth have ownership in the interview and that they are guiding the process. If I open the door (by building rapport initially), they are more likely to invite the information in."

Holly Sorgen
Youth Connections

members or other caring adults who would typically serve as support to a struggling young adult…."[38]

Responding to Challenges: Strategies and Practices

Planning intervention strategies

Redekopp et al.[39] note that the key set of barriers affecting youth employment appear to be a lack of general and job-specific skills and low self-esteem with its resultant feeling of lack of control over one's life. Many intervention programs aimed at youth now focus on the "empowerment" of youth, building on the skills, knowledge, attitudes, values and interests that young people already possess and facilitating learning in basic life management skills and career planning.

Practitioners delivering such intervention programs and those working with youth individually may benefit from the approach to interventions identified and discussed in the theory, Hierarchy of Self-Directed Adaptation.[40] While the theory was developed some years ago, it continues to be useful to those working not only with youth, but also adults.[41]

In summary, the theory suggests that varying levels of intervention are effective with individuals depending on the degree to which they demonstrate self-direction, independence and the ability to adapt. Effective intervention strategies for individuals who are less self-directed, less independent and less adaptable, involve providing intensive support. Effective strategies for individuals demonstrating higher levels of self-direction, independence and adaptability, involve less intense support, include advising or guiding. As the individual becomes more self-directed, coaching becomes an effective strategy. The theory suggests that intervention strategies, such as formal instruction and self-help, are effective as the individual becomes more self-directed and adaptable. A brief discussion follows regarding the three levels of intervention strategies effective with less self-directed individuals: intensive support, advising/guiding and coaching.[42]

Intensive support

The beginning of a transition is frequently a very uncertain time. Individuals are entering new environments and may be less self-directed and adaptable. Effective interventions include

- providing one-on-one assistance, including advocacy
- involving trained peers to provide peer advocacy
- facilitating client awareness of skills, values, beliefs and knowledge
- helping clients build a vision for their preferred future
- facilitating client awareness of transferability of their skills.

Advising/guiding

Because the move to independence may be gradual, intervention at the advising/guiding stage monitors and guides clients' actions rather than engaging in action on their behalf. During this stage it is helpful to:

- continue to facilitate learning of life management skills
- encourage clients to begin to make connections between their vision, their assets and the opportunities in the labour market
- assign tasks for clients to undertake independently
- encourage clients to begin identifying areas in which they need help, thus taking on increased responsibility for their own career development.

Flexing the intervention strategy to address the need

"We used to just give workshops. Now we are one-on-one more than anything in the beginning, especially to develop initial trust and rapport and to discuss any personal information. Then we move into a group setting and they [youth] are more ready for it."

Holly Sorgen
Youth Connections

Coaching

At the coaching stage the emphasis moves from one-on-one counselling to group instruction and counselling. Some characteristics of interventions that are effective at this stage are:

- The intervention is still relatively directive, but clients make more choices and engage in independent actions.
- The emphasis continues on life management skills, with increased focus on decision making and career planning.
- Counsellors participate in the role of coach while clients develop career-building strategies, including educational and financial plans.
- Peer coaching may be introduced as a valuable intervention.

Peer advocacy and coaching

Traditional approaches to youth employment counselling often do not address the many initial barriers and needs that youth experience in their daily lives. In addition, many young people are wary of the "system" and may have difficulty relating to the professionals who are there to help them. Young people often find it less intimidating or threatening to seek help from their equals. Peers have the natural advantage of "having been there."

Peer helpers are traditionally trained to listen and provide support. Advocacy involves "active support, especially the act of pleading or arguing for something."[43] The role of peer advocacy takes support to another level. For example, the peer advocate may initially "hold the client's hand" while they both tackle the problems and issues the client is dealing with. However, the goal of a peer advocacy/coaching relationship or program is to shift the responsibility to clients as their self-confidence and self-reliance grows, empowering them to effectively use services available to them.

Helping youth with self-esteem issues

Frequently, youth who have not experienced many successes also have issues related to self-esteem. Following are some time-tested suggestions for programs using discussion and activities to work with self-esteem issues:[44]

- Explore clients' current level of self-esteem.
- Examine where self-esteem comes from.
- Examine the messages clients received as a child.
- Help clients learn to nurture themselves.
- Use affirmations to build self-esteem.
- Use a journal as a self-esteem building tool.

Counsellors are in a position to help clients work through self-esteem issues effectively. At the same time, it is important to recognize issues that emerge that require professional intervention and to refer such clients to appropriate resources while still remaining supportive.

Enhancing resiliency...

"Two critical factors that are known to help youth overcome the challenges they face are positive, trusting relationships with adults, and connections to external support systems, such as schools, religious organizations and cultural communities and youth groups."

Casey Family Programs[45]
As cited in *From Adolescence to Adulthood: Navigating the transition*

Helping clients build personal support systems

Understanding how to develop and access a personal support network is vital to the maintenance of a satisfactory career path. Young people, especially, need the day-to-day assistance and emotional balance that an effective support system can provide. Support may be built from the groups that follow.[46]

Family and friends

Young people may have unsupportive family relationships or may be distanced from their families. It may be helpful to explore relationships within the family, including extended family and friends, to determine who might be sources of support. When immediate family are not available for support, sometimes grandparents, aunts or uncles and even old friends of the family are happy to step in. The responsibility to request support may fall to the youth. If so, they may be reluctant to make this request and will require your support to do so.

Peers

Encourage clients experiencing difficulties to develop relationships with peers who have experienced and successfully dealt with what they are going through, ideally someone who can act as a model and perhaps even as an informal mentor. This relationship could be developed through an established program or it could be one that you help your client establish.

Professionals

Young people may be mistrustful of the "system." Be clear about your role as a professional. Identify what you may be able to do for them and what they can expect from you. Be authentic and do what you say you will do. Your interaction with youth may shape how they perceive and act toward other professionals. Help clients:

- develop an understanding of services that professionals can provide
- learn how to select the appropriate professional
- learn how to communicate their needs.

Community resources

Community organizations may provide continuing growth experiences for clients, as well as an increased network of contacts and friends. If appropriate, encourage clients to consider volunteering in their community. The common experience of volunteers is that they frequently gain as much as they give. The possibilities for volunteering are endless: literacy programs, sports and cultural activities, seniors programs, etc. In addition to broadening their network, youth frequently find volunteering builds both self-esteem and skills.

Tapping into the parent connection

Many parents are very involved in the lives of their youth. Experts in the field[47] suggest tapping into this involvement by including both parents and youth in career-related activities and providing them with up-to-date information regarding current approaches to career building, new ways of working, current labour market information and effective ways to communicate with youth.[48]

The parent connection

"There is a trend to very hands-on parent involvement. Parents have a different role now where they are paying more and providing more support in many ways to their kids. We've found the best way to capitalize on the high involvement of parents is to include them. And, one of the best ways of including them is to bring them in to workshops where they are given information about the career-building process and the labour market. They even bring their kids and the kids are engaged! One of the most effective ways to engage youth in their career planning and to validate the potential career option[s] is to job shadow a portion of a workday with a qualified worker in the chosen field of work. Parents are ve[illegible]rked to a vast array of people and occupations within their communities. Employers may also be parents and are quite willing to embrace these experiences in the workplace for youth."

Dale Gullekson

Elk Island Public Schools

Building skills and support through mentors

Mentoring relationships

"Mentoring is a powerful and popular way for people to learn a variety of personal and professional skills. In fact, mentoring is one of the oldest forms of influence….most adults can identify a person who, at some time in their life, had a significant and positive impact on them. Mentors can be friends, relatives, co-workers, teachers, as well as historic or contemporary personalities. Most often, a mentor is a more experienced or older person who acts as a role model, compatriot, challenger, guide or cheerleader."[49]

Some common examples of mentoring relationships follow:[50]

- "Women executives assist other women to break the 'glass ceiling.'
- Senior citizens demonstrate hobbies to elementary students.
- Business managers take new employees 'under their wings.'
- Volunteers partner with students at risk of dropping out of school.
- People managing life challenges provide support and wisdom to others.

- Older students help younger students cope with peer pressure.
- University alumni provide guidance to students seeking business careers.
- Experienced faculty members assist their newer colleagues.
- Successful business people help new entrepreneurs starting out."

Finding a mentor

Clients may benefit from establishing mentoring relationships with experienced individuals from whom they can learn. Counsellors can encourage youth to identify the type of assistance they might need or areas they would value learning more about and to locate an appropriate mentor. Peer Resources, a Canadian organization that is a recognized expert in mentoring, coaching and peer helping, offers tips on finding a mentor. Some examples of these tips follow:[51]

- "Check with local businesses or organizations to determine whether they have a formal mentor program you can access… [or] if they can provide you the names of any retired executives who might be willing to act as volunteer mentors.
- Ask your local Chamber of Commerce whether they have created a mentor program or service.
- If you are enrolled in a college or university, make an appointment with their student career services to find out if they have a list of volunteer mentors…
- Connect with exhibit areas of conferences and conventions associated with your field; these are often free admission events staffed by experienced persons who could be potential mentors.
- Use your network of friends and relatives to let them know what kind of person you want as a mentor. Ask them to keep alert to someone who could help you.
- Visit a retirement or senior citizen center and let them know you are looking for a mentor in a certain area…"

Tips for learning through mentors

Once a mentor relationship has been established, it is important to maximize the learning experiences available. The following tips may be helpful for clients:[52]

- "Prior to your first meeting with your mentor, write down at least three things you would like to achieve through mentoring. Rank the three items in order of importance to you. Also write down three things that concern you most about meeting with your mentor. Rank these three things in order of importance.
- If not included in… [previous] lists…, write down at least three attitudes or perspectives you will be able to provide during the mentoring sessions. If possible, write down three things about yourself that might get in the way of you being able to make the most of the mentoring opportunity.
- If not included in your lists, write down at least three things you would like your mentor to provide.
- Prepare a brief autobiography based on the above lists that you can share with your mentor when you first meet. Be sure to also include your own vision, mission or life goals.
- It is likely that you selected your mentor or were matched with your mentor because of the mentor's resources. This typically means that your mentor has both considerable gifts and a tight time schedule. Dealing with time is a key aspect of the success of mentoring. Make sure you are clear about your needs…
- The focus of most successful mentoring is mutual learning. Feel free to explore what you have to offer the mentor. A sense of humour and a sense of enjoyment of your time together are essential as well. If your needs are not being met, discuss this with your mentor. Terminating a mentoring relationship or switching to a different mentor are not signs of failure. Recognizing your changing needs and finding a respectful way to meet your learning goals are keys to successful executive mentoring."

Group work

Group work can be a successful intervention with unemployed youth for many reasons, including the fact that it can offer a means of:

- establishing peer support
- overcoming isolation
- developing social skills
- expanding contacts.

Creating a youth-friendly group environment

If there isn't an appropriate group in the area to whom you can refer young clients, you may decide to explore the possibility of establishing one. Frequently, organizational environments that are adult-focused interfere with the effective delivery of youth-focused services, including groups. Consider the following suggestions to create a youth-friendly environment:[53]

- Flexible timing: Be open to meeting times that suit the schedules of youth participants.
- Transportation: Schedule group get-togethers in accessible locations. If possible, provide travel vouchers or reimburse for travel immediately.
- Food: Provide food at meetings where possible. Snacks help establish an inviting and warm atmosphere. Food is an added bonus for youth who may not be receiving adequate nutrition.
- Equipment: Provide access to computers, telephones and other equipment to support clients in their career-building process.

The following are some time-tested strategies and approaches that have been used in effective groups for youth and that may also apply to one-on-one counselling situations:[54]

- Facilitate a process through which group members identify group expectations for behaviour or guidelines as well as consequences for breaking the guidelines. Youth take ownership in the group and will enforce the expectations they have set.
- Request that group members be honest about their absences and make contact when they cannot attend. Demanding perfect attendance may be unrealistic. When members are allowed to return to the group after absences, they often display increased motivation and commitment.
- Build trust by displaying sincerity, honesty, objectivity and a non-judgemental attitude rather than through specific activities.
- Have the group set small, achievable goals. (Even if you, as the counsellor, have ideas you feel are more appropriate, try to ensure that the group establishes the goals.) When these goals are achieved together, the counsellor's credibility grows.
- Demonstrate support and belief in group members even when they fail to achieve their set goals. Follow through on individual agreements to apply consequences for unacceptable behaviour.
- When planning activities, have the group identify what interests them. Counsellors should consult the group first to prevent setting themselves up for disaster. Group members can take responsibility to plan or assist in planning many group activities, particularly those of a social nature.
- Lead by example. Counsellors shouldn't be afraid to get their hands dirty. Counsellors should never ask a client to do something that they would feel uncomfortable doing themselves.
- To generate discussion, try storytelling, role playing and/or game playing (for example, *Scruples* or *Win, Lose or Draw*). The more creative counsellors are, the more they will succeed with this client group.
- Often, issues and feelings important to youth come up unexpectedly. For counsellors, this frequently means setting aside their agenda to deal with the issue of the moment. As issues arise in the group, they are meaningful and often offer outstanding learning opportunities. Seize them as "teachable moments."
- Be aware of personal limitations. Issues like sexual abuse, physical abuse, suicide, etc. often come up with individuals and in groups. If counsellors do not have group therapy background, it is not advisable to enter this territory. Know where to draw the line and call in or refer to outside help. In addition, it is extremely important for counsellors to be aware of their ethical and legal obligations regarding the reporting of knowledge of these issues.

> *"I think one of the most important things that I have learned regarding career development and youth, is creativity and patience; all good things will happen within their own timeframe. The best ideas, strategies, resources and interventions cannot be forced upon people. When the clients are 'ready' the best ideas and services will make sense and move forward."*
>
> Dale Gullekson
> Elk Island Public Schools

Helping clients with limited education

As previously discussed, education has become an increasingly important prerequisite to employment. An important responsibility for counsellors working with youth who have limited education, is to help them see that there are many ways, both formal and informal, to learn. The following excerpt from Circuit Coach, an on-line resource for practitioners working with youth, identifies some of these alternative routes to learning.

Short list of formal education and training programs:[55]

- "Alternatives to regular high school include distance learning or correspondence, Internet-based schooling, private or group tutoring, and co-operative education programs involving work experience. A popular combination of alternatives is computer-based high school courses supported by a teacher or tutor.
- Short-term courses are usually just a few months long and focus on specific skills needed to enter particular workplaces or a particular industry (for example, building maintenance).
- Training-on-the-job may be ad hoc or formal and can range from learning the role of cook's helper while working in a busy kitchen to learning how to service vending machines.
- Apprenticeship programs combine formalized on-the-job training, formal classroom instruction and standardized examinations. Established by provincial/territorial governments in consultation with industry, people sign on with employers as apprentices and work towards becoming a journeyperson in that trade. There are around 50 trades registered in each jurisdiction across Canada.
- Some provinces have created another entrance into the trades to encourage teens to consider the trades. For example, the Alberta Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP) allows youth to get credit for the hours they work while still in high school.
- Some post-secondary studies include work experience components such as practicums and co-operative programs that allow students to alternate periods in the classroom with periods of work with an employer registered by the institution.
- Certificate programs are usually one year or less at a college or some other post-secondary institution. They are primarily used to prepare students for gateway or portal roles in various sectors of the economy. Examples might be turf grass management, home care attendant, or glasscutter.
- Diploma programs are two years in length and prepare students for employment in particular groups of occupations. For example, a diploma in computer programming or computer systems technology from a technical institution prepares students to work in a variety of roles in the information technology or software industries.
- Bachelor degree programs prepare students for entry-level professional positions across a wide range of sectors. These could range from rehabilitation therapist to commerce."

Helping clients stay motivated...

"When they [youth] return to school, December can be a dark month, and they get really discouraged...I ask them, 'What were you doing, what was your vision, when you decided to return to school?' to help them remember why they're there, why they chose to return to school, how it relates to their vision, their hopes or goals. We also talk about their family, especially if they have children, what their hopes are for them. Or, they write letters to themselves before they go back to school and then open them later. It all helps them remember why they chose to go back to school."

Holly Sorgen
Youth Connections

Short list of informal learning media and techniques:[56]

- "listening to audio tapes
- watching [DVDs], video tapes or television programs
- surfing the Internet
- attending a weekend or evening seminar
- asking a friend or acquaintance if you can shadow him/her to learn what he/she does
- reading books, manuals, magazines, journals, newspapers

- asking a friend to show you how to do something
- working as a volunteer for a cause you care about."

Prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR)[57]
"Much of this kind of informal learning is now being recognized by institutions and employers through PLAR (Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition). This is a process of identifying what a person knows and can do. The results can certainly be useful to someone who wishes to have skills recognized, even if that person doesn't have related formal education.

In the end, most employers want proof that you have the skills they require. As long as you can demonstrate you've mastered them, the way you learned them is secondary. Prior learning assessments also occur regularly at post-secondary institutions. The admissions officers or registrars determine how much credit potential students will receive for previous training or work experience.

It may be worthwhile to help youth clients become more aware of these informal ways to learn. Research indicates that people who experience difficulty learning often benefit from trying different approaches."

Helping youth with the transition to adulthood

The most successful youth career programs address life issues as an integral part of facilitating the career-building process. Youth in transition to adulthood face a variety of challenges and benefit from help and support managing the transition process.

Youth participating in focus groups organized by McGregor and Coleman[58] identified a variety of information and resources that would be most helpful to them as they make the transition to adulthood. An adaptation of their list follows:

- finding affordable housing
- gaining effective job skills
- managing money
- learning about landlord/tenant responsibilities
- finding options for school for those over 18
- finding help when kicked out and homeless
- balancing developing your own morals/values and those of family without offending them
- dealing with stress
- learning to be goal oriented
- learning organizational skills
- managing going to work and going to school at the same time while living on your own
- having a heightened awareness of the world (locally/globally)
- hearing motivational speakers on drugs and alcohol issues
- managing inner turmoil/stressful situations that contribute to not working or going to school
- building self-confidence.

Focusing on Employment

> *"Youth have a microwave mentality. They just want to pop all their skills, interests, values into the oven, hit 'go' and expect their occupational choice to come out fully cooked."*
> Kristen Cumming
> Red Deer College

The goal in career counselling young clients is to teach them how to take control of their careers. The desired result is a clearer sense of direction and a greater sense of control over their destiny.

Myth busting and lifelong career planning[59]
In order to manage the constant change and the socio-economic conditions we all face, career planning has become a lifelong process. "Canadians change occupations every 5 years and jobs every 3 years according to Canadian labor mobility data."[60] Each change brings with it the demand for new skills and/or knowledge. Given this information, youth will appreciate that:

- a multitude of career choices are available to them
- career decisions can be made rationally and in an ongoing fashion
- career development is lifelong.

This information will help dispel the myth, common with youth and their parents, that they must make one momentous decision in answer to the age-old question, "What do I want to be when I grow up?"[61]

Skills for the 21st Century

Characteristics of the 21st century workers

Alberta Careers Update 2004[62] identifies the following characteristics that workers of this century will need to be successful:

- "high level of initiative and imagination
- high degree of flexibility
- focus on innovation and creative solutions to problems
- constantly questioning mind
- entrepreneurial nature.

They will also need to be:

- multifunctional
- accountable
- good communicators
- computer and communications literate
- self-directed team players
- willing to learn, to upgrade skills and to accept accountability
- willing to propose ideas for a healthy work environment."

Conference Board of Canada: Employability skills 2000+

The Conference Board of Canada's Employability Skills 2000+ is a nationally recognized list of skills that "you need to enter, stay in and progress in the world of work—whether you work on your own or as part of a team."[63] The Conference Board skills list includes three skill areas, major skills groups related to each area and specific skills related to each major skill. The skill areas and major skill groups are:

- fundamental skills: needed as a base for further development
  - communicate
  - manage information
  - use numbers
  - think and solve problems
- personal management skills: personal skills, attitudes and behaviours that drive potential for growth
  - demonstrate positive attitudes and behaviours
  - be responsible
  - be adaptable
  - learn continuously
  - work safely
- teamwork skills: skills and attributes needed to contribute productively
  - work with others
  - participate in projects and tasks.

A new self-assessment tool (Fall 2005) for students is also available on-line at The Conference Board of Canada's SkillsSolutionsNet.[64]

Beginning the career-building process

Helping clients create a vision for the future

"A key element in assisting youth with their future is to assist them in developing a vision or *preferred future*. This is a statement or description of the life the youth would like to live, a best of all worlds of one's ideal life."

The preferred future and reality

It is important to realize that you can inhibit the free flow thinking of clients engaged in the preferred future activities if you suggest that they think about the future in realistic terms. Your role is not to try and protect your clients from failure. By advising them to be realistic, you are squelching any creative juices that your clients may have.

Since the preferred future is such a long way down the road, your clients will have time for plenty of confrontations with reality. To impose it now is to further deny clients the chance to explore a myriad of opportunities that exist within workplaces today. By getting real, clients tend to focus on specific jobs or occupational roles…thereby closing off thoughts of desired activities and plans. The purpose of establishing a narrative or personal story is to generate a North Star for your clients. This will allow them to focus on multiple pathways, rather than specific destinations. The personal development of a dream future is a sign that clients have begun to lift from their shoulders the burden that is suppressing hope—hope for a better future."[65]

Counsellors can use many approaches to help youth create their visions or preferred futures. Circuit Coach, an on-line resource, provides a variety of ideas for facilitating this process.[66]

Creating self-portraits: Helping clients identify their skills, values and beliefs

Creating self-portraits is one process that facilitates exploration of a variety of life roles, both work and non-work, and assists youth to see the transferability of their skills.[67] This approach is particularly valuable for youth who have had limited or no work experience and who may have difficulty identifying specific skills they possess.

An important skill in self-care

"An important skill that counsellors can teach youth is how to advocate and negotiate for themselves."

Audrey Stechynsky

Human Resources and Skill Development Canada

Helping clients build skills

Wherever possible, encourage clients to consider the following skill-building experiences that allow them to become involved directly in the world of work. Some of these learning experiences may be structured and attached to specific school or training programs. Others may be initiated by youth with counsellor support.

One caution regarding youth arranging skill-building experiences independently relates to safety. This topic is discussed in more detail later in this chapter. Ensure that youth understand and attend to safety issues in the workplace. Also related is the issue of workers' compensation: youth should be aware of this issue and should be covered when they are on a worksite.

Skill-building experiences

Following are some examples of where youth can gain hands-on skill-building experiences in the workplace:[68]

- through volunteer work, youth can
  - learn new skills, receive free training, build relationships and gain potential references while contributing to the community
  - gain job experience that employers value
- through work experience, youth can
  - gain job experience, an employer reference and, sometimes, a job offer
- through job shadowing, youth can
  - follow a worker in a job of interest
  - observe first-hand what the work involves
  - gain information that helps with career decisions
- through internships and co-ops, youth can
  - gain on-the-job experience related to an area of training/education
- through part-time positions, youth can
  - gain on-the-job experience related to a preferred future
  - experience new work environments and build new skills.

Here's a tip for encouraging youth to do the research

"The research component is crucial and it's hard to get youth to complete it. Try this:

- Pair up youth, so that each partner is interested in a different sector/ industry.
- Have youth complete the research for their partner's interest area (no less than five completed calls), then report back.

It takes the pressure off, they are accountable to someone else to complete and they can be more objective. It works!"

Kristen Cumming

Red Deer College

Portfolios: Easing the transition from school to work

Following is an adapted version of information regarding portfolios that appears on the Alberta Learning Information Service (ALIS) website.[69]

Employers agree that a portfolio definitely gives job seekers an edge in an interview. A portfolio represents the individual. It is like a living résumé. It might be a collection of items in a portable case, a binder, a CD or even a video. Whatever form a portfolio takes, it should highlight important events and skills built to the date it was created. The items in the portfolio provide solid proof of what the individual can do.

Creating a portfolio can help in some important ways:

- Building a portfolio will remind the client of all the great skills they have developed.
- Portfolios are great way for clients to showcase their skills and abilities to employers, post-secondary institutions and anyone else that might need this information. It gives clients some concrete examples to show they have the skills they claim to have in their résumé.
- Clients' ability to explain their skills and provide evidence of them is a winning combination. People remember best what they've seen and heard.

About portfolios...

"I highly recommend that youth develop portfolios. A portfolio is almost essential for a student."

Audrey Stechynsky

Human Resources and Skills Development Canada

Ways of working

Traditional full-time, permanent employment has given way to different ways of working. Many are not new; they simply have not been seen as preferred work alternatives in the past. *Alberta Careers Update 2004* reinforces this fact, stating that "more flexible work patterns, telecommuting, job sharing, part-time work and combination jobs" are some of the characteristics of the 21st century workplace.[70] The book *Radical Change in the World of Work: The workbook* identifies the following work alternatives:[71]

Part-time employment
Working to a job description for a single employer less than 30 hours a week.

Multi-tracking
Holding two or more jobs at the same time.

Job sharing
Working with one or more person(s) to fulfill a single job description for a single employer.

Contracting
Working within a specific job or project description for a specific, contracted period of time for a single employer or client.

Talent pooling
Working with a group of individuals with complementary but different talents. Frequently the "pool" changes with varying projects requiring different talents.

Consulting
Working to complete specific tasks within specific timeframes on a number of projects simultaneously, often for a number of different clients.

Self-employment
Developing, producing and marketing services and/or products in a one-person operation.

Entrepreneurship
Developing, producing and marketing services and/or products in an operation that involves managing others.

The alternative of entrepreneurship, along with self-employment, has become increasingly viable for youth. "In a survey of university students… Ispos-Reid recently [2005] found that 40 per cent would like to be their own bosses by becoming entrepreneurs or consultants."[72] Many programs offer support and funding to young entrepreneurs. Encourage youth with entrepreneurial dreams to pursue them by thoroughly researching and testing them for viability.

Each work alternative has its advantages and disadvantages. The one big advantage they offer is increased flexibility in how we approach work. This flexibility may be very appealing to youth. It is important that youth view these options for what they are— alternatives to the traditional ways of working—and not as simply representing failure to achieve traditional full-time, permanent employment. Experience reflects that youth are much more accepting of these different ways of working than many adults, especially their parents.

Go global

In our global economy, a whole new world of opportunity awaits youth who go global. Work opportunities exist around the world, particularly in developing countries. These opportunities take a variety of forms, from volunteer assistance in developing infrastructure to well-paid positions of considerable responsibility in a variety of sectors. Many initiatives backed through the public and private sectors support youth in pursuit of international work experience.

Know your rights

Many youth may have little or no exposure to the world of work. In fact, they may be entering the workforce for the first time. Some youth who have not had the benefit of previous experience and who have limited decision-making skills may lack the confidence to challenge employers and are at risk of exploitation by employers.

It will be helpful for these young people to be aware of their rights. Counsellors can help youth become aware of applicable provincial employment standards. The standards address such things as:

- wages
- holidays
- deductions
- hours of work
- overtime
- vacations
- general holidays
- maternity and parental leave
- termination
- employment for individuals under 18 years of age.

Counsellors are in a position to assist youth who believe their rights have been infringed upon and who lack confidence to deal with situations directly.

Safety at work

Workers aged 15 to 24 are one-third more likely to be injured on the job than those over 25.[73] In 2004, 13 young Alberta workers, aged 15 to 24, were killed by work-related accidents.[74] No matter what the work role, there is always an element of risk. The publication *X-treme Safety: Survival tips for rookies in the workplace* provides the following safety tips for youth entering new jobs:[75]

- Know the rules.
- Have proper training.
- Assess the risks and have a plan to deal with them.
- Use safety equipment and protective clothing.
- Communicate with your team, co-workers and leaders.

If an injury occurs, coverage might be available through the Workers' Compensation Board (WCB). The WCB supports injured workers with compensation and rehabilitative services to assist them in returning to work. Youth should be aware of their responsibility to report any injury, no matter how insignificant, to their employer.

Helping clients present a positive attitude to employers

Remaining positive throughout a job search is key to being successful. It is important to remind youth to focus on their strengths and how those strengths match what the employer is looking for. They may, indeed, possess the perfect combination of skills, experience, personality and attitude for which a prospective employer is looking.

As job applicants, clients can help prospective employers make decisions in the clients' favour by:[76]

- demonstrating an understanding of the company's goals and current situation
- presenting positive reasons for wanting to work for the employer
- describing how they can increase the employer's productivity
- demonstrating acceptance or accommodation of company structure
- being willing to work for a reasonable wage
- being genuine in the interview.

In Conclusion

Of all factors, education has the biggest impact on employment success. There is a direct link between the level of education completed and the rate of unemployment. The higher the level of education completed, the higher the rate of employment.[77]

It is important to encourage and support youth in completing their education. Many youth, particularly those at risk, have not had successful experiences in the school system. Many alternatives to traditional schooling now exist, particularly at the secondary level. Many school districts offer alternative programs that feature individualized, relatively flexible and innovative approaches. Distance learning and virtual schools offer further opportunities for individualized programs. Contact your local school district(s) to help youth explore educational alternatives to the traditional classroom.

Alternatively, some youth will find success in one or more of the many non-school training programs that are available. Ongoing learning is a fact of life and an essential ingredient in a successful career. Counsellors play an important role in helping youth discover and pursue the learning that works best for them.

Websites and Resource Organizations

Aboriginal Youth Business Council. Retrieved May 27, 2005, from **www.aybc.org**

- provides information for Aboriginal youth interested in learning about business, including a business centre, profiles of youth entrepreneurs and their businesses, resource list and related links

Aboriginal Youth Network. Retrieved May 27, 2005, from **www.ayn.ca**

- provides information on programs, services, health news, cultural events and much more for Aboriginal youth

Alberta Tech Prep/Central Alberta Tech Prep. Retrieved June 2, 2005, from **www.techprep.ab.ca**

- offers information on this program that promotes integration of classroom and worksite learning

Canada World Youth. Retrieved May 27, 2005, from **www.cwy-jcm.org**

- a national, not-for-profit organization that co-ordinates international youth education and national exchange programs
- has information about programs, participants and how to apply

Canada's SchoolNet. Retrieved June 2, 2005, from **www.schoolnet.ca**

- promotes effective use of information and communications technologies in learning
- brings educators, students, parents together to share educational resources, enhance learning and develop information technology skills

Canadian Youth Business Foundation. Retrieved May 27, 2005, from **www.cybf.ca**

- a not-for-profit, private sector initiative for young Canadian entrepreneurs creating new businesses
- includes information on mentoring, business support and financing

Career Edge. Retrieved May 27, 2005, from **www.careeredge.org**

- offers information about private-sector internships for university, college and high school graduates, including registration for employers and youth

Career Paths online.com. Retrieved May 27, 2005, from **www.careerpathsonline.com**

- has tips, quizzes, real-life stories related to youth and career building
- provides a 10-step interactive career planning tool at **www.careerpathsonline.com/research/article.html**

CAREERS: The Next Generation. Retrieved May 27, 2005, from **www.nextgen.org**

- an Alberta provincewide initiative promoting integration of worksite and classroom learning

Circuit Coach. Retrieved June 1, 2005, from **www.ccdf.ca/NewCoach/english**

- a training and reference tool that provides current, practical information on helping youth with career development issues and helping practitioners with professional development

Cornell Youth and Work Program. Retrieved May 27, 2005, from **www.human.cornell.edu/youthwork**

- provides research and development of school-to-work opportunities, including program tools, research tools and publications to download
- offers program information and training activities for workplace mentoring

Growing up digital. Retrieved June 2, 2005, from **www.growingupdigital.com**

- has information related to Tapscott's book Growing Up Digital, with a section for kids

Motiv8 Online. Retrieved June 2, 2005, from motiv8.com

- an e-zine with articles on finding, keeping and creating work
- offers insights on everything from health and finance to building healthy relationships and creating personal success

nextSteps.org. Retrieved June 1, 2005, from **www.nextsteps.org**

- Calgary-based career development and job finding information, including an on-line career-planning tool

Peer Resources. Retrieved May 31, 2005, from **www.peer.ca**

- provides information on peer programs, mentoring and coaching, with articles, training programs, certified trainers and links to related information

Service Alberta. Retrieved June 3, 2005, from **www.gov.ab.ca**

- links to services for youth including employment, education, getting a driver's licence and more

StudyAbroad.com. Retrieved June 2, 2005, from **www.studyabroad.com**

- an American-based campus marketing company posts listings for study abroad programs in more than 100 countries throughout the world

Youth Connections. Retrieved June 2, 2005, from **www.gov.ab.ca/hre/youthconnections**

- connects Alberta youth with businesses looking for employees who are seeking meaningful employment
- includes program information and contact information for offices

Youth Employment Strategy. Retrieved June 2, 2005, from **www.hrsdc.gc.ca/en/epb/yi/yep/newprog/yesprograms.shtml**

- has information on programs and funding for youth facing barriers to employment

youth.gc.ca. Retrieved May 30, 2005, from **www.youth.gc.ca**

- Government of Canada's main youth site, with information on youth programs, services, resources and many more links

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